

life in two worlds



Drawing by Ossip Zadkine

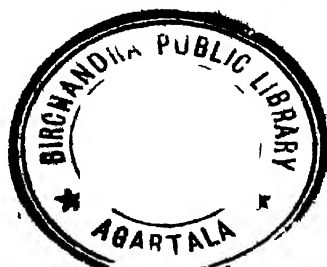
LIFE IN TWO WORLDS

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with a preface by Ossip Zadkine

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FOR MY DAUGHTER



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preface

THE MANUSCRIPT WHICH MY OLD FRIEND MAREVNA FORWARDED TO ME proved to be memoirs of her long life. She traces its intricate pattern from one event to another without being wise after the event, and without attempting to whitewash. It is nevertheless a very true chronicle of the origins of Montparnasse. Into that remote vein of Paris, the so-called "quartier anglais", there was suddenly injected new blood, seething with impatience, passion and ambition. Montmartre at that period was failing more and more to attract young artists, either from France or abroad. It was becoming ever more involved in the night life of Paris, and its scintillating lights. The last stragglers of the Impressionist army were disappearing into obscurity, whereas the paintings of that school started, as it were, a rich golden dance upon the dusty auction tables of the Hôtel Druot. Montmartre became less and less satisfactory to the coming generation of French painters, and large numbers of enthusiastic young artists from all corners of our little planet were drawn by the imminent eruption of that new and somewhat provincial volcano, Mount Parnassus.

Marevna was one of the thousands of human particles attracted by this increase in temperature. When I recall the phenomenon, it is like some strange fair that was set up on the least poetic and least picturesque of spots, a corner of two boulevards with two cafés on each side. Nearby an academy of art offered rooms for painting and modelling, with no restrictions. It was from this odd entry that Marevna and others of us started the dance of life which for so many became a *danse macabre*, or, more politely, became a faceless existence where many of us hang as limply as dead or dying flies, killed in the struggle. One thinks almost with terror of the number of us who still paint, still exhibit in *salons de peinture*, and still after a whole life of conflict we artists smile the poor smile of some ageing prostitute, soliciting a line of praise in a newspaper.

Marevna's book is a *témoignage* of those remembered days. For me it is full of a sharp and piquant romanticism. Yet those pages in the book which will be read with tears and poignant regret by some, will be skipped through by others with the impatience of a shopkeeper who to his dying day still treats art with the solemn thoroughness of an ant.

Men of this species never have cared and never will care that not far from them, when they too were young, there occurred something

preface

most extraordinary. For just round the corner, something very vital was born, febrile and of burning importance.

Nowadays we have lost that strange and irregular inspiration that works like a mysterious spell on the young and the human, and creates sustenance and joy for future generations. The future will be nourished on the warm liver of that Prometheus who one day dared to raid Olympus and bring fire to humanity.

OSSIP ZADKINE

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I

WHEN I RECALL MY CHILDHOOD I SEEM TO SMELL A MIXTURE of wild scents: damp wood on the banks of the Volga and Kazanka Rivers, the fragrance of the boundless forest, dead leaves, autumn - the thousand smells of the steppe, . . .

I was born in 1892 in Cheboksary, then a little provincial town in the Department of Kazan, now the capital of the Chuvash Soviet Republic. I remember freezing winters and tropical summers; but it was from the cold that I suffered most.

My father, Bronislav Vikientievich Stebelsky, had studied at Warsaw and Leningrad and had then been appointed inspector of waters and forests in this same Department of Kazan. His principal occupation was re-afforestation, where too much felling had been done; contending with the diseases of trees and with forest fires; and laying out and maintaining roads and tracks. It was his duty, too, to deal in the name of the state with the Tatars who wished to own property in the forests. The Russian government liked to dispatch its young officials to the depths of its most distant provinces - especially if they were Polish - to keep them away from Poland and the chief centres of intellectual agitation. My father had been born in Warsaw: he was a gentleman, a boyar. He was tall and slim, with small hands and feet. For a long time I thought him very handsome. His pale-blue eyes became paler still and flashed like glass in the sun when he was angry; but I liked it better when his glance fell upon me, smiling and sly. I remember his great, fair moustache, stained brown by tobacco-smoke, and how he was always elegant and upright, which gave him a somewhat military look, and made everyone in the district call him "Your Honour". He never beat me or punished me; he would merely look at me, sometimes, with eyes that were so severe, so cold, that I suffered more than if I had been really punished.

About my mother there is nothing I can tell.

Until I was more than three I called a woman who was my father's legal wife, *Maman*; and when she had gone for good I was entrusted, each time my father was away, to the care of servants, sometimes for several days at a time. My father never spoke to me of my mother, or of her side of the family, till I was eighteen; and I never questioned him about them. There might have been a mysterious door between us, of which my father kept the key. I never dared to cross the threshold of this secret room even when I was older. Now I know how necessary is sincerity between parents and children,

and how children can suffer from every form of hypocrisy and falsehood.

I must not blame my father too much. He was young; he no longer got on with his wife; and he preferred me to her. In the arguments, some of them very violent, which broke out between them, I was often the subject of dispute; but I was ignorant of the cause of their quarrels; the noise of their voices frightened me; I wept, and sometimes I would drag them towards each other to try to join their hands. Sometimes they were touched by these pretty, childish ways and by my grief, and would be reconciled; but at others my father would go out in a rage, slamming the doors, and I would hear the sobs of his wife. Then I would be paralysed with terror and would hide somewhere, anywhere at all. I would stay hidden under the bed, on the freezing parquet floor or in the wardrobe, under a desk, in the kitchen; or, in summer, in the garden, on top of a huge heap of hay in the stable, in the little outhouse where the baths were, in the cellar; in the end I would fall asleep, and they would come and pull me out of my hiding place after they had looked everywhere else. Sometimes I fell ill after these escapades. I was yearning for peace and quiet; I was waiting for them to remember me, for them to come and look for me, and call me softly; waiting for calm to return to the house. And my father, feeling guilty, would call for me by all sorts of tender names, "little mouse", "little fish", "little bird": then I would show myself. I left the heap of hay, or the cellar, where I had helped myself to heaps of good things: salted gherkins, sauerkraut, apples, preserved water melons – anything I could lay my hands on. This usually ended with a fearful stomach ache and a fresh parental dispute. My nerves became worse and worse; I slept less and less well, and I had bad dreams, nightmares in which I saw myself forsaken, abandoned and alone in a world populated by monsters. Neither the man nor the woman realized the harm they were doing me by quarrelling in front of me.

But there were also longish periods of peace, and from these I remember a house full of friends: colleagues of my father's – sometimes fellow Poles – who had come with their wives from neighbouring towns or even from a neighbouring Department, by coach or by train or, in the winter, even by sledge. And in summer we would go and camp out in the forest or on the steppe, and the men would shoot game, big and small, accompanied by my father's house-Tatars. After the day's shooting the bag was laid out on the ground and shared. A

fire was lit and a huge hind-quarter was set to roast over it. Everyone sat down round it, the Tatars a little to the rear with the dogs and horses. The greenish blue and violet shadow, the mass of the woods, the sun setting in gold and blood, the scent and mystery of the forest, were so many elements which were deeply infused into the thrilling heart of a child. At such moments I forgot all my sadness. And I loved the horses, the dogs and the Tatars who laughed and jabbered their gibberish, of which I did not understand a syllable, but who sang, too – and how I loved the nostalgia of those monotonous chants. The only black spot on the excursion, for me, was the sight of the motionless forms laid out side by side on the grass, which a moment before were still leaping about or flying among the trees. The conscience of a child of three or four refused to think this natural, and I was grieved for the poor game. My father gently made fun of me and promised that he would soon teach me to ride a horse, and would take me shooting with him. "Poor little chicken: in order to live you must become as strong as the eagle; otherwise it will be life that eats you."

Poor father! He would certainly have preferred to have a son, and my little girl's sensibility provoked him. In any case he was determined to harden my nerves. It was with this in view that he told me to stand at the edge of a precipice.

"Pay attention," he warned me. "I'm going to fire. Above all don't move: don't change your position. If you do, you can see you're going to fall down among the frogs. A boy wouldn't fall . . . understand, little bird?"

And to please my papa I stood there, clenching my little buttocks and my little fists. He fired, and I kept my two feet stuck to the ground, without flinching.

"Bravo! Once more, and you'll be a real boy!"

I asked my father later what he would have done if I had rolled over the precipice.

"No," he said, "that was impossible. *I had you under my eye.* And even if you had fallen, there was my fine dog down below: I had sent him there beforehand and he would have fished you out if necessary. And besides, the water was only up to one's knees; and I should have come down, in my turn, to pull you out by the ears."

That is what he was like: full of kindness to me – sometimes even too kind – and at other times quite uncomprehending of a child's heart, and so hard he made you shudder.

life in two worlds.

I was two when he mounted me in front of him across the neck of his horse Épervier, and we rode quietly as far as the forestry hut in the middle of the woods. How happy I was in my father's arms, and so at ease! — so much more at ease than when I was alone.

The horse's neck rather hurt my tender behind, but I did not complain. I should not have liked my father to tease me.

The forestry hut had a good smell of wood. It was full of cardboard boxes in which there were pinned out splendid butterflies and all sorts of insects. There were also big herbals, on the pages of which he had stuck numerous flowers, leaves and grasses. On the walls, as on those of our house in the town, were the stuffed heads of every kind of beast and bird. I greatly respected my father, for it was said in the neighbourhood that he had killed bear, deer and wild boar, that he deliberately sought difficult game, and that he was a first-class sportsman. For me this silent hut in the middle of a forest full of bird song, whistles and scurrings was the haunted dwelling place of mystery. I loved it, but at the same time I was frightened by those rows of still trophies. However, my father showed me the wonders of his collections, and took advantage of this to give me some instruction. I adored that, and remembered every word.

Back in the town, I would run off to see my cow and the hens, the pigs and the dogs. We had lots of dogs, and they were a torment to me. They soon threw me down on the ground and began to lick and nip me. There was no great malice in them, of course, but I used to yell piercingly at the sight of their fangs. My father would come out with his whip, at the threat of which the dogs would leave me alone and make off with their tails between their legs; and I, tired of my romp with the dogs, would go and lie down between the cow's feet, and suck greedily at her teats, one after the other. My father would look across and laugh.

AMONG THE BENEVOLENT COUNTENANCES THAT BENT OVER my infancy I recall with affection that of my grandmother, my father's mother, at Warsaw, and that of my Russian *nyanya*. The latter's face, red and wrinkled as an apple, was covered with great moles – "beauty spots", people said – bristling with white hairs. I often told her that when I was grown up I should take her to the doctor's to have these lumps cut off, and make her beautiful.

I dearly loved this little old woman who washed and soaped me in a great tub of water, tucked me up in bed and sang me songs and told me stories, of which she had an inexhaustible stock. I do not know why my father was unwilling to keep her: perhaps he considered that her influence would be harmful to my education; or perhaps she had faults that my child's heart and head were incapable of discovering.

There was also the cook, a huge, clamorous woman; a girl of sixteen or seventeen, Katya, who acted as maid and whose duty it was to look after me; and a Polish coachman, called Ivan, who was a fearful guard.

Ivan was my *bête noire*. How many times Father thrashed him because of me! And poor Katya, too – ignorant, heedless Katya!

One day, when my father was out and I was left alone with the servants, I asked to sit in the big swing in the middle of the yard. Ivan and Katya began to push me so hard – to give me pleasure, they told my father afterwards – that I grew giddy and begged them to stop if they did not want to see me fall. They went on pushing harder than ever. Desperate, breathless, I let go the rope and landed with all my weight on my behind. My father found me unwell when he came home, and I told him about the spitefulness of the two servants. They got a horsewhipping: the girl below her skirts and the man on the lower part of his back.

Another time, too, Katya had taken me out. It was winter and my father had taken the sledge, so we went on foot. I can still see the room that Katya took me into: there was a table with a big box on it in which there was a doll. Candles had been lit round the box.

"Look . . . the poor little doll! She's got broken and she will never be able to open her pretty eyes. . . ."

There were two women there, too, weeping, a young one and an old one.

"I say, why did she get broken, then – the doll?"

"She was very, very ill. And now she'll go up to heaven. Whatever you do don't tell your father you've been here."

【When Father came home he found me in a high fever. I had caught diphtheria, and in my delirium I talked of a doll going up to heaven. My father cared for me like a mother, helped by a doctor and some friends. The stupid Katya had taken me to visit some people she knew, who had just lost their little girl through diphtheria.

The servants! They sometimes made my father tear his hair. I remember another day, when Katya was not well and it was the cook who went for a walk with me. My father was out this time, too. (When he was at home we went out together, by sledge, by *troika* or on horse-back.) The cook took me out into the fields. It was summer, and there was nothing to be seen but grasses and flowers. She led me up to a great hole in the ground which an old *muzhik* had just finished digging. After a minute a group of five or six women came towards the hole. They had dish-cloths on their shoulders, rolled up so as to form pads, and on these they carried a big coffin in which lay a beautiful young girl. The *babas* set the coffin on the ground, for me to have a good look. The girl was laid out in a white embroidered chemise, with her hands crossed on her breast. A crown of flowers and ribbons had been placed on her head. Her hair fell on each side in long plaits, below her shoulders to her hips, like two black snakes. She was such a beautiful creature that I could not take my eyes off her. She was quite pink, with a scarlet mouth and black eyelashes – I thought I saw them quiver and I cried out:

"But she's alive! She's alive, that beautiful girl!"

"No, no," the women answered. "Alas! She's really dead! And there's nothing more that can be done. . . ."

And they wiped their eyes.

As the cook was taking me away I kept turning round, to get time to see the coffin which was already disappearing into the black hole.

The scene made a fearful impression on me. I was four years old, and I could not manage to forget the young girl in her coffin, like a beautiful princess imprisoned by a spell and, in her sleeping wood, herself the victim of an enchanted slumber. I dreamed of her, and at night I would shout out loud, "She is alive! She mustn't be put in the hole!" I learned later that girls who have done themselves to death are painted and powdered and then buried without a *pope*¹ (the *cortège* consisting only of women) in a grave dug outside the cemetery, in a field or on the steppe.

¹ A priest of the Russian Orthodox Church.

AS SOON AS MY FATHER TURNED HIS BACK THE THREE wretches I have spoken of used to start tormenting me. It was far worse after my stepmother left us; the servants thought then that they would easily be able to take advantage and make a fool of a man who was alone and generally far too lazy to take particular notice of all that went on in the house, especially in the kitchen, the stables and the cellar. In fact, my father insisted on only one thing, that they should watch over me. But in the evenings when he was away these people wanted to amuse themselves and even to go out. And there was I, who would not go to sleep because I was kept thinking. . . . Another minute, and perhaps Papa will come. . . . I poisoned their existence!

To make me sleep, or to make me at least leave them in peace, the coachman had found a way of shutting my mouth for a whole evening. He would take some tall stilts and stand on them, dressed up in rags and disguised as a monster. He would rap on the wall of my room and on the window panes, sticking his distorted face against the glass, roaring and threatening me with a big stick. I would bury my head under the bed-clothes, and sometimes my father, coming home in the middle of the night, would find me terrified and half suffocated. Then I would tell him stories of monsters and devils that I had seen through the window; and I told him also that I had recognized Ivan under the bearskin when he had come into my room on all fours to frighten me, and had pulled me out by the legs from under the bed where I had hidden. I besought my father never to leave me again, because people frightened me too much. I dreamed of nothing but devils, living corpses, witches. My poor child's brain was worked to death.

So it was that one day, when I had complained of Ivan, I saw out of the window my father, horsewhip in hand, go into the stable, followed by Ivan hanging his head. That was always where people were chastized. I heard a rain of blows, and on the one hand I was pleased that my father should punish the coachman, but on the other I was still more afraid of the latter's vengeance.

When it was over Ivan came out, red in the face and holding up his breeches with both hands. His braces dragged on the ground behind him. I was ashamed for him, and even felt sorry. The dogs used to obey their master when they had been punished once or twice; but this man was really something of a sadist, and without any doubt he was a blockhead; only he was a good driver. He was there; my father

could not have found anyone as good, and for that reason he was forced to keep him.

As I have said, my father never beat me. I must, of course, have played some pranks, and been disobedient; and perhaps my character was beginning to be spoilt under the ruinous influence of the servants. My father was vexed, but he said nothing. He contented himself with looking at me, his eyes pale with anger, and going out of doors, slamming the door. And I was left to myself, to the solitude of our house. Evening fell slowly; shadows came in through the window and settled everywhere – under the big, red armchairs, under the tables, behind the sofa and the cupboard. The long curtains stirred, and I was prepared to see the devil in person come from behind them to carry me off. All the shooting trophies, the dead, stuffed beasts, the birds on the walls, began to move and to look at me, while I stayed there, on the chair where my father had left me, crying quietly, calling him and asking him to forgive me, certain that he would never come back, and seeing myself lost, alone in the world, as the price of my ingratitude and naughtiness. I swore to myself never to tell him another word about the servants, and rather to suffer than to see him beside himself with anger and grief – my over-sensitive, childish heart felt that my father was not very happy.

One evening, when I was already in bed, I got up, overcome by a peculiar feeling. Barefooted, in my nightgown, I crossed the room and went into my father's study. At that time, as I one day admitted to him, I thought I had been dreaming, but later on he told me himself that it was quite true. At a moment when, yielding to great distress, to a mood of surrender, to weariness, he was about to kill himself with a pistol bullet, I had gone into his office, with my bare feet and my long child's nightgown, my light hair all dishevelled from lying in bed. I had gone up to him as he sat with his elbows on the desk, one hand covering his eyes and the other holding the pistol as it lay before him. . . . I had gone up and taken hold of this man's hand, which was trembling. The hand that covered his eyes dropped, and I saw tears run down his pale cheeks and his moustache. He seized me in his arms, kissed me and carried me to bed. He also told me, later on, that he had realized that day that it was his duty to live for me.

I GROW AND MATURED VERY QUICKLY IN THIS HOT, HEAVY climate of suspense and solitary childhood. I learned as quickly that my father was most unhappy. He was irked by his work under a harsh sky, among a people whose language and whose minds he did not understand, and his loneliness weighed upon him. He caught malaria and suffered cruelly, besides, from haemorrhoids; all of which, added to the other worries of his private life, was slowly but surely undermining his health.

When I was older I realized that my father's dearest wish was for peace, and to live his life – that this desire to live was an urgent one. With his age and his work his health was rapidly forsaking him: perhaps he had a presentiment of his end. But I remember how at times he was gay and kind; he seemed so joyful and so young. I would dance round him and clasp his knees, so as to climb on to his shoulder, like a little wild cat.

My stepmother had gone away one day in winter, taking all my belongings with her; and there fell to my father the heavy task of fitting me out again entirely. I began by sulking at the too-big shoes, the black stockings and the plain, shapeless clothes that he had had to buy for me as quickly as he could, and I could not forget my white pelisse, my rabbit's fur hood, my embroidered frocks and all my lacy, ribboned underclothes. Little by little, however, spoiled child that I was, my smart, gay wardrobe was restored. My father was ready for any insanity in order to distract me and make me forget the absence of the woman I considered to be my real mother.

It was at this time that he began to treat me as a boy.

He had found a good way of saving time by having my hair cut *en brosse*, so that he could arrange it more easily, for I could not bear anyone except him to touch my hair. Every morning before he was dressed he used to inspect the whole of my small body, to see whether I had any spots or whether a bed-bug had strayed over me. He also scrupulously inspected my chamber-pot, confirming that the contents were laudable in quantity, quality and colour; if they weren't he gave me a purge (which I loathed), taking a little himself to give me confidence.

If he was in a great hurry he would pour me out two big cups of milky tea before he went, with huge folded pieces of bread and butter with French bread (big rolls made of very white flour, which people ate with great relish). Besides this, coarse bread was baked in the la

every week.) The samovar was always on the table, and I learned to pour out for my father, just as he poured out for me.

After the woman I called my mother went, I found I enjoyed complete freedom. To keep me amused and occupied my father made me a present of several books, some sheets of paper and some pencils, and I spent hours scribbling in the books and on the pieces of white paper. This was how my passion for drawing was born.

Winter was endless, and it was a season when I was often ill and had to keep my room. While I waited for my father, if his work kept him from the house, I passed the time by looking at coloured pictures in the story books of which he brought me great numbers. One day I took a notion to make a frock like one I had seen in a picture; so I gave the maid all the money I had in my money-box, and asked her to bring me back the finest stuff she could find. She came back with a length of fearful striped material suitable for making a cover for an armchair – a kind of Persian weave. I made a long, narrow skirt of it with swelling sleeves to the corsage. When I looked at myself in the glass I thought I looked very fine indeed, except for my hair, which was rather short for this fanciful get-up; so I seized some raffia and manufactured tresses which I managed to keep on my head with the help of a handkerchief. And I must say that this seemed to give the finest effect possible. The first time my father saw me rigged out like this he was amazed to begin with, but then he shouted with laughter.

How sweet to me is the memory of those long winter evenings when my father was there to keep me company. I can see his study quite clearly, the long room, a green shade hanging from the ceiling, big, red velvet curtains covering the window (beyond it, I knew there was the snow and the whole depth of the night). Father would sit down at a little frame to make one of his innumerable nets for game – there were such pretty ones, of all shapes and sizes. Or he would take a small saw and cut out shapes in wood – birds or flowers – with which he would decorate adorable miniature objects: little boxes for me, cabinets for his own use, tiny medicine cupboards and lots of other things. Or again, his brows knit and drawn up for battle, he wrote his reports, and I had to keep still; and I also would take a sheet of paper and scrawl, scrawl with breathless haste, muttering as I wrote. We tried to see which of us could work the harder, and it was always my father who finally broke the silence. He would laugh and ask me what I could be writing, and to whom?

"I'm writing to the Tsar to ask him to give you lots of money, so that we can leave this ugly place and go to a sunny country. It's too cold here and it's always night . . . always night. It lasts too long."

"We'll go away to a sunny country, you'll see, little fish," he would promise me.

Sometimes he would be cleaning his firearms and heaven knows how many he had. I loved helping him to do this. It was I who used to fill his cartridges with powder and lead, then the felt wads and a disc of cardboard. The copper cap he put in himself. I was very proud of taking part in this manly occupation. Sometimes, even, we both forgot that I was a quite small girl. He talked to me of how to catch birds and rabbits, and how one hunted one animal or another. The dogs lay at our feet, and in the dining room next door the samovar was singing on the table. There was peace and calm all round. Such moments for me were the *summum bonum*, and I had nothing to wish for. I fell asleep in my armchair or on my father's knees, and he would put me to bed himself. His moustache brushed my forehead and I covered his face with passionate kisses and murmured: "I don't want you to leave me: never, never."

"Well, you'll have to marry one day, little daughter: you'll go away."

"No, no. If I have to marry it'll be you, Papa, eh? And we'll stay together all our lives."

And I fell asleep brimming with love

5

IN ORDER NOT TO LEAVE ME ALONE WITH THE SERVANTS my father took me with him whenever he could. I went shooting with him when he went out with friends. Sometimes there were several *tarataykas*¹ that set out for the steppe, and these were gala days for me. We took plenty of victuals and two big tents. A gentle wind was wafted over the boundless steppe and beneath it the grass undulated

¹ A sort of gig.

and changed colour from green to silver, mauve or russet. Here and there little Kirgiz tents could be seen, dusky or variegated, and peaceful flocks of sheep, or herds of wild horses, their manes flying, galloped madly, small, and swift as the wind. Then there would be nothing but silence, the grass, and the sky with its great white clouds.

"Life is good here," our friends would say.

"We live in the midst of savages," said my father, "but, by Jove! one can't deny that these fellows are as free as air."

I would say: "If you stay with me I shan't go away. All our life we'll go shooting and drink *kumys*."

"No, thank you," my father answered. "I've no desire to smell like a he-goat and see you change into a little nanny-goat."

The tents were pitched in the tall grass, and we spent the night there, talking, smoking, eating, and drinking *kumys*, the fermented milk of a heifer or a mare. We went out shooting pheasants, and when evening came big fires were lit and a young sheep was roasted. Sitting round a *kostër*¹ people played the guitar and the balalaika. After Russian songs, sad or gay, came the monotonous, nostalgic recitatives of the Kirgiz, accompanied only by little primitive flutes.

Night fell at last. Only the song of millions of crickets could be heard, accompanying the unvarying, fascinating singing of the nomads. Some way away the horses stamped. The sky was low, the stars enormous. Night on the steppe was one great fragrance, and I believe that at those times, as I lay gathered in my father's arms under the gentle wind, I was not the only one to feel happiness.

*Broad is the steppe
And tall the grass;
Kirgiz and Kalmyk pasture flocks –*

Afterwards, when I met the life of other beings in a state of primitiveness, I understood that this dream was a reality, and that I had indeed seen these Tatars, free and happy among their sheep, hunting, almost flying, after gazelles, on their little horses. The other peoples, too, whom I was to see later on, in the Caucasus, led a free, aboriginal existence, and seemed happy. For me it was the memory of paradise lost.

¹ A bonfire of wood.

ALAS! ALL THESE AMUSEMENTS CAME TO AN END. IN ORDER to secure for me a better education my father determined to separate me from the inauspicious influence of the servants, and he engaged a governess. She had a daughter of her own aged nine, and I was four and a half. She found my clothes improper for the daughter of a civil servant.

The woman was unable to gain my confidence. Her preference for her own daughter was only too obvious, and it is quite possible that my father noticed it himself. The first beating she gave me – without my father's approval, I am sure – made me feel thoroughly rebellious against them, and I retreated into myself. I could no longer be on the same terms with my father as before.

"This – or that – mustn't be done," she spent her time saying to me. "A well brought up little girl doesn't do that sort of thing. Otherwise your father won't love you any more. He'll like Zoya better: she's better brought up than you are. And she's intelligent. *She* can read and write."

At this I wanted to learn to read and write, whatever the effort it might cost me. I sweated over strokes and letters to make my father pleased; but I couldn't help noticing that he was prouder of my drawing.

Zoya could not draw a line, and she was nine! I still was not five. From then on I began to stick to drawing as hard as I could. This meant that I was able to create a universe which grownup people had no right to enter, and it did not take me long to realize that I gained besides a prestige that I had not expected. My father bought me paints, pencils, albums. He gave me great encouragement.

"Your daughter, now: it's going well, her work?" his friends would ask.

"Oh, going: it's going from good to better," he answered. "My daughter's a winner: she'll go far. I've always said I'd make an artist of her."

I saw my governess's face grow longer and her daughter burst out laughing: they both thought my father was joking. Perhaps it was out of jealousy, too, that this woman and her child really hurt me – oh, not badly, certainly, but none the less the business has remained graven on my memory.

Zoya was a mean, spiteful little girl. She wanted to make a doll out of me, to treat me like some sort of pet. She told me funny things that

I did not understand properly, but which bothered me. She used to come when I was in bed and suck my breasts. One fine day, when her mother was saying that I was a naughty, hypocritical child, I retorted: "And what about your girl? What's she like? She sucked my breasts: and why did she do that?" My words put her in a rage, and she demanded that her daughter should tell her the truth. Zoya answered that I was nothing but a liar. And that was when I had my first beating – an undeserved one.

I did not cry, but I lost my appetite. I felt ashamed before my father. I knew that I could have told him my truth, but he asked me no questions: he contented himself with looking at me with an odd expression. (I was convinced that he loved me no more and believed that I was a bad girl. I think now that he did not wish to become involved in our affairs.) I lost my gaiety, too. I no longer dared to climb on to his knees, to pull his eyebrows and moustache, nor to go to sleep in his arms. Two pairs of eyes were watching every gesture of mine, and my father, perhaps in order not to show his weakness for me, restrained himself and affected not to see me. Then I would go and hide in the garden or the yard to escape the surveillance of those two females who constantly followed my steps.

Besides this, my father, his long solitude ended, showed off before the young governess, and began to make up to her. (To please her he forsook me and started flattering Zoya.) I remember a time when I suddenly felt frightened and went to look for my father. I found him lying in bed: there was nothing extraordinary in that, but I was stupefied when I saw four feet sticking out from under the blankets, four feet in socks of the same sort of wool. In winter my father always wore Tatar socks of many colours. I saw nothing more: I did not want to see any more: I was frightened and I nearly fainted. But I said nothing, either to my father or to his mistress. I felt that it would have been a bad thing to talk of this incident, and that my father would have been greatly displeased. Besides, the harm was done. My child's eyes no longer saw things in the same way. It must be true, for when I looked at my father, and still more when I looked at her, she did not fail to find fault with the insolence of my glances and my stupidity.

One day, when my father had gone out to inspect something and the governess was out too, I had stopped behind to play with Zoya. As usual she wanted to give me orders. I refused to obey and in a rage she

seized – on purpose or by chance, I do not know – a bottle, and poured the contents over my hands. It was a poison, an acid which very quickly burnt my skin. I began to cry and to call my father.

“It’s all very well for you to call him,” she shouted at me. “He’s far away. You’ll die, and he’ll become my father.”

In desperation I began to utter such yells that the servants came upstairs to see what was going on. The coachman, seeing the bottle on the floor and the burns on my hands, seized me in his arms and ran down to throw me into the snow, fully dressed, but in my indoor clothes (that is to say with only a frock on). He rubbed my hands with snow, and my face too, for some drops of acid had splashed my cheeks. Towards evening my governess came home, and then my father. When the servants told him about the bottle, and he heard that I had a sore throat and a temperature, he summoned the governess into his study. Through the closed door I heard a real storm raging. And from that evening, as before, my father gave his time to me, his “red fish”; and in spite of my illness I felt very happy to have regained his love, even at such a price.

* * *

Thanks to my father I learned to love nature and to understand its poetry; I learned also the love of solitude, which gave peace to the nerves and acted like an anodyne on the violence of my nature.

Sometimes my father took me alone with an old fisherman on board a boat on the river, the Kazanka, or perhaps on the Volga itself. I can see now the great waters all round me, wide as a sea, and the blue sky bathing in them, with its white clouds on the horizon. I watched the water flowing, brilliant and trembling, like a silver snake; I heard the ripples tapping against the side of the boat, and I breathed in, sniffing, like a little animal, the unique, incomparable fragrance of the river, that pure water which smelled of moist wood and seemed to perfume the clouds that came in from the steppe, itself coloured by the sky and the sun. For hours on end I would sit there as though in a dream. My father was silent: I could see his eyes, blue and clear as the sky, comely and calm. The old man leaned out over the water and mumbled something, blaming the fish that were slow to show themselves.

It was thus that I learned a love for silence, and for sinking myself in contemplation, and at the same time my inner life was being enriched and my imagination developed.

I grew up free and independent, and the presence of my father was in itself enough in those days. I remember his kind gaiety, his teasing, his whims, and his occasional dumb anger with me. At other times, I saw him so sad and silent that I could hardly breathe. But always, at every moment of my life as a child, his face was the first that I found bent over me.

He spoilt me terribly. When I think of all the toys he heaped on me, and which I broke, all the books I tore, all the money I gave my nurse from my ever-full money-box, without her even having to ask!

On some evenings, when he came home late and I was already in bed, I would open my eyes and see him, like a giant in his long, tippeted cloak lined with grey astrakhan, and his tall *papakha*, a fur cap which covered his whole head. His eyebrows and moustache were white with hoar-frost, but he was laughing. He held an armful of game, furred and feathered, which he had killed.

"Here: it's for you, with the compliments of the great forest."

And he would lay a rabbit or a bird before me, still soiled with blood and smelling of the thousand scents of the forest, fur or feathers damp with snow. I used to press these presents to my heart and to my lips, and I slept till morning with these dead animals, if my father ever forgot to take them away. In the morning my nurse's surprised and scared looks made me laugh. My head was covered with feathers, my hair was stuck to a rabbit's nose, and I was all soiled with the lavish blood of the animals I had fraternized with during the night.

I was rather sorry for the poor beasts. For all I knew how to ride and often went out with my father, I could not get used to the cruel spectacle of shooting. It annoyed my father, who could not accept such squeamishness in the daughter of such a sportsman as himself. I liked shooting as a game – the feverish preparations, the dogs, the exuberant shouts and gestures, the gaiety of my father and his friends, the eagerness of the servants, the impatience of the horses, the *tarantases* in which the ladies sat and where the samovar was put with the baskets of provisions; and then the forest, the steppe. . . . All that was what I loved. Out hunting I should always have liked the fox to get away, and the rabbit too. I was sorry for the bear and the roe-deer. It was only the wolf I was not sorry for, knowing his cruelty to poor men who had lost their way. I was afraid of the wild boar, too.

Carriages.

I confess I have never in my life dared to kill an animal; and Father was ashamed of me for it.

One day he ordered a *muzhik* to bring a sack into my room.

"Well, little mouse, you've been asking long enough for a little sister. Here you are: your wishes are fulfilled. Open this sack, there's a splendid surprise in it. Come on, open the sack."

So I opened the sack, and there was something in it that moved. Horrors! I saw the head of a bear cub come out. With one leap I was on the sofa, but the little beast was as quick as I was: in no time at all he was on the sofa, too, almost on top of me, licking me and growling. My father calmed me somewhat by telling me that it was only a baby bear that wanted its mamma. It was brought a feeding bottle, and very soon there it was, lying on its back and sucking away.

"You see? It does what you do; it sucks cow's milk, like you," said my father, laughing.

The bear cub and I became great friends. Not only did it suck my cow's milk, but I would put my clothes on it, my socks and even a straw hat that I used to plant firmly on its head. When Tatars came to see us, on business – that is for interminable palavers – if I heard a knock I used sometimes to go and open the door myself with my friend. How terrified the poor people were at the sight! They thought they had met the devil in person. They tumbled down the steps as fast as they could, abandoning their weapons and their baggage. My father was enchanted at getting rid of them so quickly. Then, when the good fellows realized that it was only a bear cub wearing clothes, they came back; but they kept their distance, for they were afraid of all three of us, Father, the bear and myself.

This imp of a bear lived with us for a whole year. Finally my father decided to kill it, but only because he had determined to bid farewell to this land of snow and to move to a sunny country, the Caucasus. When I heard what the end, the sad end, of my friend had been, I was truly grieved, and I am sure that this was the first time that I rebelled against my father. It was after that day, too, that I began to be afraid of him. He had made me a present of something that was better than a toy, better than a dog or a cat. I had become very much attached to the animal, and then bang! a rifle shot, and I saw the poor beast's skin crucified on a plank: that was all that was left to me of him. My father did his best to console me, and promised me other animals, but whatever he did meant nothing to me. Something was broken in my little

heart. After this I sulked at my father for a long time. Of course he couldn't drag the animal with us on our journey, and no one had been willing to adopt it: people were far too much afraid of it. On the other hand, if it had been released in the forest the other wild animals would have eaten it. But the bear had been my protector from the servants, they were so frightened of it; and I had taken the opportunity of plaguing them: it amused me to order it to make a show of attacking them, walking on its hind legs, which it never failed to do, snarling the while, to my huge joy. At other times, when my father had visitors, he would ask me to put on my famous frock, dress the bear, and then come into the drawing room. So I put on my motley array, and dressed the bear in my everyday frock; then we made our entry, I holding the animal by the paw. I would never have believed that grownups could laugh so.

"Have a good look at my daughter!" my father would say. "She's turned dressmaker now. And that's her foster-sister."

Then he would make them admire my daubs and sketches, and assert that he would make an artist of me: "It will be a fine joke to have an artist in the family!"

7

MY HEART LEAPED WITH JOY WHEN MY FATHER TOLD ME that it was all settled, that we were soon going to live in a sunny country where I should never be ill again. The first question I asked him that day was whether the governess and her daughter would be coming with us. My father said No, and my joy was complete. I was afraid of nothing any more. I even became as nice and as gentle to the lady as could be, while she herself became the personification of sadness when she learned that my father intended to leave the province.

Father sold my dear cow - "We'll buy another" - sold the horses, the pigs and the fowls. The furniture, packed in a number of large cases, went ahead of us by train and steamer to Tiflis. We were to go first to Poland to visit my paternal grandparents; then to travel from



there to the Caucasus. It was a real adventure, and I stamped my feet with impatience, sad though I was at leaving the places where, in spite of everything, I had lived happily in my father's company.

We left Cheboksary by sledge, wrapped in furs and rugs among which I vanished from sight, literally buried. I had put on my *valenki*, high felt boots, very warm, and the bottom of the sledge was covered with straw to protect our feet from the cold; but all the same I felt my extremities becoming gradually frozen, so that at the end of some time I felt that I had no legs left. From time to time my father would lean over me, slip his hand under the rugs and rub my knees vigorously.

"Patience, Manichka," he said. "Be brave. Papa is very cold, too. So is the driver. And look at the poor horses; they haven't got fine fur capes like you and me."

With his moustache and eyebrows covered with rime he looked like Santa Claus. I blinked my eyes: my nose and mouth were lost under the rugs and I could not speak. I saw the night come and the stars light their lamps. . . .

We crossed the frozen Kazanka in order to reach the station and catch the train which would take us to Lodz. For me it was the end of the world. The horses' bells sounded their music, which cradled me and made me drowsy. Dogs were barking far away: we were approaching the town. The countryside around was already drowned in shadow. Everywhere there was snow, blue-grey or violet snow, against the darker hue of the starry sky. Not a crow, not an *izba*:¹ nothing but the white, frozen steppe, and the wind, the cold wind yelling and whistling round us.

At one moment I thought I could hear the ravening, howls of wolves. I shivered and my frightened eyes turned towards the imposing profile of my father (with his cape and his *papakha* one would have taken him for a general). He was quite impassive: perhaps he heard too, and did not want to show it. Only the driver turned round to shout something to him and then began to lash the horses with all his might.

When we reached the station I could no longer walk. Father had to lift me out of the sledge and carry me to the overheated waiting room, where at last my circulation returned. The station was swarming with people, full of noise and shouting. For a moment Father left me alone in the refreshment room, in front of some steaming tea and *kalachi*, a kind of white loaf, while he went to take the tickets and look after the

¹ Peasant hut.

luggage, which the driver was carrying into the station. I was shivering, but it was my keen emotion that was making me feverish. Then with porters bringing the luggage on barrows and Papa carrying me in his arms, we went on to the platform. I did not know what I was in for.

Suddenly I heard a terrifying howl and I saw a sort of huge monster, with eyes as big as two moons, coming straight at us, prancing and snorting fearfully. I gripped my father's neck and hid my face in the collar of his cape.

"Come on, *durochka* (little stupid): it's the engine; and behind it there's the train. Look: the carriages are lit up. Come, come, don't be foolish. Be brave. We're going to go up into a carriage and you must try to hold yourself upright on your feet for a few minutes. And above all don't fall down: this isn't the time for that. Look: all those people are going to get on board the train, and no one's frightened of it."

I regained confidence, and, when he had put me in the upper berth and taken his place on the lower one, the clean sheets and the warmth of the bed-clothes fully reassured me, and I was asleep in no time.

* * *

Here I can say goodbye to the lonely years of my real childhood. Goodbye for ever to the great Volga and the Kazanka, to the forests, to the magnificence of the steppe and to its nomads. Goodbye to intimacy with my father. A new life was going to begin for both of us, a more complicated one, for him as for me. The little wild girl with hair the colour of wheat, eyes as blue as cornflowers and black eyebrows and eyelashes, was sorry to leave her enchanted universe, with its small sadnesses, to become acquainted, alas! with another universe of greater griefs, under other skies. We were moving to a marvellous country, no doubt, but a still greater loneliness was waiting for me there, and pains and torments which were out of proportion to my age.

THERE WE WERE, THEN, ON THE WAY TO POLAND. A FEW days later we arrived at Lodz where my father's mother and father lived. My first impression was rather unfavourable. Lodz seemed to me an old town and somewhat dirty. I was struck by the great number of factory chimneys. The sky was grey; and the people were no longer dressed in embroidered white linen, in white or black sheepskin *kaf-tans*, and *lapti* (a kind of sandal of natural colour made from plaited bark), as they had been at Cheboksary. Everyone here was dressed in black, like my father; there were lots of men to be seen in long black garments like *popes*—these were Jews. But my grandfather and grandmother were charming, anyhow. Grandfather had a white beard parted in two, which made him look like the picture of a general I had seen in one of my books. He smoked a very long pipe, wore a long *khalat* (dressing gown) and embroidered slippers, and was accustomed to spit everywhere, even at table (it was the pipe that gave him this ugly habit). He was almost always in a good humour, but also he used to hum, which unfailingly exasperated my grandmother.

Grandmother herself was very active, always busy, always on the trot, seeing to the management of the house, the maid, the cook. She was rather short, shorter than her husband, but held herself very upright. Her white hair was parted in two tresses and was covered with a *nakolka* of black lace, a sort of cap perched on the top of the head, with a streamer falling low on the nape of the neck. She wore a black silk frock with white lace at the neck and wrists. She was gentleness itself with me, and let me sleep with her in her big bed. Grandfather slept by himself. I was often woken in the night by grandmother's fits of coughing, for she was greatly troubled with asthma. I would watch with pity how she held her chest with both hands and was almost suffocated with coughing. It reminded me of my stepmother, who also coughed a lot. I learned later that she was consumptive, which was the reason that by day she was put on a camp bed in the stable, where she lay for hours. The smell of ammonia did her good, the doctors claimed in those days, and for the same reason she drank crude petroleum. This made me advise Grandmother to do the same, and in the middle of her paroxysms she managed to smile and shake her head.

I could soon see that she worshipped my father, and perhaps that is why she took to me too. A little girl with no mother is almost an orphan. She was certainly sorry for me, and admired her son for having courageously taken on the difficult task of bringing up a little girl by

himself. Besides this, I noticed that Papa's whole family, brothers, sisters and cousins, looked at me with a certain curiosity and some envy. I was embarrassed by this, and did not understand why. Perhaps they would have liked to be in my place, when they saw how I was spoilt by my father and left so much at liberty. Papa was full of stories about me, and above all did not fail to say that I had a gift for drawing and colour. This gave me some importance, and I was glad that Father drew attention to me before these well brought up children – all as ordinary as could be.

My grandmother often took me shopping in the market quarter. That was where I made closer acquaintance with Jews. At all the grocers' stalls, in all the shops that sold material or clothes, these same scraggy men were to be found in their long black *kafians*. They wore a full beard and the little *zubeyka*, a black skull-cap, and they all had two ringlets, i.e. one in front of each ear, and wore white socks and stockings. The women wore a wig over their hair, but it was usually badly arranged and regularly allowed locks of another colour to escape, more or less knotted into a *chignon*. The houses were overcrowded and the children unclean. You walked from the street into rooms swarming with bawling, gesticulating families. Near the door there was invariably a dirty stream, dabbled in by boys who were dressed like their fathers. The little girls had fine heads of hair, in curls or plaited.

What struck me most in a district of this sort was the smell, penetrating and rather sickly, which nauseated me the first few times. I asked Grandmother the reason for the general stench and what made this particular smell. She laughed, and said this tiresome aroma came from the garlic which the Jews ate raw and put into all their dishes.

"But I like garlic, too, Babushka!"¹

"Oh, what an idea! We don't put up with it at home, I warn you. The smell of it makes me sick. These people eat far too much of it, and that's why there's such a stench here."

I found this smell again later on, even stronger, at Tiflis, in certain native quarters, and later still in Italy and France, notably at Marseilles. Food cooked with olive oil and garlic I dote on, myself!

I had an uncle at Lodz, my father's brother-in-law, who was a chemist. He had three girls and two boys, and I often went to their house to play with them. We used to go down to the cellar, which was

¹ Grandmother

filled with boxes and cases of medicaments. My big cousin, a boy of nine or ten, would bring out the tonic wine which we tasted and thought delicious. By evening we were red in the face and very tipsy and overexcited, we jumped about and made a noise like wild things. (The secret was discovered afterwards, and the cellar was locked.) Or we would sit on the window sill, armed with long glass tubes (another find in the cellar), and blow big soap bubbles. From the first floor we watched these drifting and sinking slowly, and sometimes they would burst on someone's head or full in his face. I remember a time when a Jew got one in his face: he stopped, and began to insult us in a fine old way. Some loungers collected, and finally a policeman arrived who had heard the reason for the crowd. He raised his head and called to us sternly:

"It is forbidden to spit soap on to the heads of passers by, *even Jews!*"

We told this to my uncle and to Papa, and they thought it very funny. I was too small to understand what was odd about such an allusion, but in the grownups' conversation I often heard phrases like "dirty Jew", "he's only a Jew", "filthy race", and so on. I did not understand the reason and I was shocked.

My boy and girl cousins were more puny than I was: above all I was more of a fighter. (At Cheboksary, young as I was, I used to fight with boys in the street.) I did not hesitate to bite, and I already had some power with my fists. Our games often turned into brawls, and Papa scolded me, but Grandmother tried to excuse me, and told my father that it was his fault if I was more of a boy than a girl. And next time I would restrain myself and let myself be licked. I please Papa. But that wasn't to his taste, either. In the end he decided that I was perfectly right not to allow myself to be licked like a milk-op, and to stick up for myself. I was hardly six.

When the time came to part everyone was most anxious about Father: it was such a long journey he was undertaking, into a country that was unknown, wild, even dangerous, so it was said in those days; and with a child on his hands! Really, it was not at all wise. I heard all these remarks, and I became more and more agitated. Grandmother suggested keeping me with her, but I was more horrified still at the idea of parting from Father. And then he held out. Heaven knows, the lives of both of us would certainly have been different if he had left me in Poland.

The day we were to leave was settled; and when the time came the tears streamed from my grandparents' eyes.

"Take great care, darling," said Grandmother. "Come back to us soon with Manusia. We're old – come back soon – and write!"

9

AT LAST WE WERE ON THE TRAIN EN ROUTE FOR OUR GREAT adventure. My heart was jumping for joy. What mattered the dangers and difficulties of a long journey, so long as I was with my father? I knew he was a fine, brave man, and, now that I was familiar with trains, travelling was entrancing.

Unfortunately we had to break the journey at Odessa, for I had caught cold and became very ill. My father engaged a nurse, who slept in my room, and to the sufferings of my illness was added the torture of jealousy: my father displayed an obvious liking for this young woman, and this delayed my recovery. Out of jealousy I refused to let myself be nursed. I was crammed with quinine which I could not swallow. There were tears. . . . At last, for fear that my father would abandon me, alone and unknown, in the hotel, I consented to be looked after, and quickly got well. We left the pretty nurse and continued our interrupted journey.

As time went on I got used, in the course of the long trips that we made together, to my father's fancies, and once I began travelling alone I understood all the unexpected charm of chance encounters; but meanwhile I was jealous, and I was not the only one to whom my childish jealousy was painful. It hurt others too, particularly my father. He was still young, he was fond of women, and they liked him very much. I witnessed his gallantries, his hand-kissing and the flowers and sweets, of which I expect I had my small share but of which the bigger went to passing lights-of-love. On every journey the same comedy was played: as if by magic a pretty woman would appear. She would make advances to me, compliment my father on my healthy looks, and compare me with a little Siberian cat (which I did indeed resemble,

from the wildness of my expression, the whiteness of my skin and the fairness of my hair). Acquaintance being made, my father would declare that he had brought up this little wild cat all by himself, and there would be cries of admiration for the man and for the child. I was coaxed and tickled, as though I were a nice little animal which nevertheless is somewhat mistrusted. If this was in a train I would find myself left alone, not knowing where my father had gone. If we got out somewhere – to change trains, my father explained – we stayed the night at a hotel. We dined *à trois*, I had chicken soup and they had champagne, of which my father would make me swallow a mouthful, just enough to make me giddy; on which I was put to bed. But I slept with one eye open. My father did not lie long in bed, also pretending to be asleep, for the door would creak gently and I would see a white, scented apparition approach his bed and bend over it. Then followed a passionate whispering (from my father), and the pair of them would tinkle out, leaving me alone. I hated this: *valse* music would be wafted up from downstairs, and sometimes I could also hear a river and the distant song of a nightingale. Then came sleep, and the bitterness of my tears was slowly forgotten in unconsciousness. In the morning I started awake when my father called: "Get up, These lazy-bones! Hurry, or we shall miss the train." He was in a delightful humour, while I sulked and pouted and was naughty; but after nights like this my father was ready to put up with any mood of mine. As for his conquest, so attentive to me the night before – "my adorable little kitten" – she looked at me less kindly in the morning. She would sigh with sympathy and say to my father: "How sorry I am for you, Bronislav Vikientievich. . . . The little one has been badly brought up and much too spoilt. Of course, I know it's no fault of yours, but it would be worth while putting her in a boarding school. Her education could only gain by it, and as for you, at least you would be free. You are so young! What a cross for you to bear." I would listen with half an ear. I was watching for the porter to come and fetch our luggage, for I was impatient to be alone with my father. I knew the lady was shocked by my *pre-earmi* I had not curtsied to her or shaken her hand, and I had refused the sweet she had offered me from the big box my father had given her the evening before. Perhaps Papa, too, was pained by my "bad upbringing" and believed that this was the real cause of my behaviour. He could not read the fear in my small heart, the fear that one of these women would succeed in carrying him off. I could be

polite and pleasant when I wanted to, if only to please him – him most of all; but the jealousy which twisted my character was there, and I avenged myself in my own way. At last the luggage had gone and we would find ourselves in the carriage again. I contained my joy while I watched their embarrassment as they said in front of me “Goodbye,” and “Perhaps we shall meet again.” They exchanged odd bits of paper, addresses, probably. They looked long at each other, and there was something in this exchange of looks that I could not yet understand. At last, a hurried kiss of the hand, a promise to write “soon and often”, and then the glad, indifferent whistle of the engine, and the train moved slowly off, drowning the last scene of the comedy in clouds of smoke and steam. Over . . . over again for this time. Father and I watched through the window the little handkerchief fluttering desperately like a butterfly in the middle of the smoke. That was all. Everything was wiped out.

“Well, Papa, here we are alone again. Do you still love me?”

“Certainly, little red fish. Certainly I love you, and I shall always love you. When you grow up you’ll understand your Papa, you horrid little tyrant and he

His face, too, in a minute ago, was clouded, but what did it matter? He was mine once more. He was watching over me every moment – until the next adventure.

Today I feel sorry for him. He was so good to me, and he was so charming and young, handsome, ardent, burning with life. It is certain that I must often have spoilt life for him, but I adored him, and I could not live in peace without him even for a few hours. I knew that for his part he adored me too, and naturally, being a spoilt child, I took advantage of it.

IO

BEYOND ODESSA I BEGAN TO MAKE OUT THROUGH THE GLASS of the carriage windows unknown people in comic clothes: men with wild looks, wearing big black or grey sheepskin *papakhas*, their dress accentuating the breadth of their shoulders, their waists slender and

delicate. It looked as if they wore a long cloak, fitting tightly from above the hips to the chest, and on each side there was a row of little elongated pockets which made me think of cartridges. The richer people actually had in their pockets objects which looked like cartridges, but their ends stuck out and were gorgeously inlaid with ivory and silver. The men's waists were tightly bound by a girdle of silver or, more simply, of leather, which supported at one side a *kinzhal* or knife, in a sheath also richly adorned in different styles. Under this outer garment, which was open at the throat and below the waist as far as the knees, there appeared a second, lighter and of a different colour. The trousers were very full and were fastened at the knees, below which were the high, supple boots. The tips of the boots were very narrow and turned up. The sleeves of the *cherkeska*, the outer garment, were very wide and were turned back so that one could see those of the undergarment, which were very narrow and buttoned at the wrist. These men's strange rig was completed by a rifle. They were bearded, and there was also something wild in their faces: a long nose, often aquiline, and big, very brilliant eyes. I could not understand a word they said, and my father would declare

"It's not a language it's a misunderstanding. These people are savages."

None the less I liked these men very much; perhaps it was their elegance which I at once found seductive. They were mostly Georgians, but I soon learned that they were several peoples in the Caucasus, talking different dialects, but all dressed the same. Our Kuban Cossacks were then beginning to wear this dress too, but instead of wearing the *bashlik*, a kind of turban which took the place of the *papakha*, on their heads, the Cossacks let it hang down over their shoulders and backs, in bad weather, storm or snow, they used it to cover their heads and protect their necks. As we approached Vladikavkaz I saw these Georgians wearing over everything a black camel's hair cloak, which this time made them look utterly fantastic. When they were on horseback this *burka* covered the whole hindquarters of the horse, and the rider seemed to be of one piece with it. Later on, when my father made trips on horseback, he wore a *burka* it was indispensable in that climate, and when one was riding it gave protection from rain and from the piercing cold of the mountain rains. I have seen Cossacks similarly dressed, but they could always be recognized for Slavs by their features. They had red or fair hair, their faces were roundish, the eyes

slitted and slightly drawn up towards the temples, the nose turned up or straight, but short. A Cossack may sometimes look like a Kirgiz, but never like a Caucasian. However, the Cossacks too were famous for their elegance, their horsemanship, their songs and their dances, and in bravery they were comparable with these mountaineers.

At Vladikavkaz we left the train to take the coach to Tiflis. The Caucasus then was going through a time which was by no means restful. The mountaineers frequently rebelled against the Russians and came down from their *auls*,¹ perched at impressive heights, to pillage travellers. They had no hesitation about killing those who resisted. Sometimes they might take prisoners away and extract a rich ransom. From time to time a woman or a young girl would disappear.

Our coach was accompanied by a strong escort of Cossacks, each armed with two rifles; even the driver was armed. The vehicle was drawn by four horses and there were two behind in reserve, for hills that were too steep. My father also was armed, and looked like a general surrounded by his staff. I was the only one of my sex and my age among all these men, but I was not frightened. On the contrary, I hoped that something would happen! There were several halts during the day, to change horses, and we slept two nights running in little inns that also served as posting stations. Perhaps my father found this journey boring (I am even sure he did), but that was because he was not enjoying it as I was. The mountains, the swift, noisy rivers, whose water sometimes bubbled like champagne – and I would run to wet my face and hands, and drink, and bring a drink for my father – I found it all exciting. In spite of the appeals of the Cossacks my father would have the coach stopped to let me have a run about, stretch my legs, or pick an unfamiliar flower; for here it was already early spring.

Where we halted for lunch or dinner we were served a small roasted sheep, whole. Goodness, how good it smelt! We also had goat's milk cheese wrapped in a goat skin, which my father liked very much and ate with cucumbers and honey – to say nothing of the aromatic herbs, such as tarragon, with which the cheese was seasoned. I found all this delightful.

"One can see you were suckled by a cow, Manichka," my father said. "You're so fond of grass."

He was always teasing me about this.

I cannot describe how happy I felt at being among simple, lovable

¹ Villages

people like this, for all that I could not understand their language. I saw them looking curiously at me. They showed me a little camel which skipped about comically on its long legs. I had never in my life seen an animal like it. It used to stick its great neck without ceremony into the *tarantas* to grab apples which I kept in a sack. . . .

Round us rose tall mountains, some of them covered with snow which shot a thousand flashes at the sun. Here and there on the peaks one could pick out a native village. Women were digging or otherwise occupied in the middle of a patch of field suspended, as it were, in the void.

"What do those people do? How do they live, and what on?" my father asked.

"They manage to grow a little wheat or barley, your Honour. They have a few vines which give them wine. Of course not much grows hereabouts: there isn't room. But down in the plains the vines are splendid: the Caucasian wines are famous. Here they live more on hunting and fishing. Lower down there's goat's milk and the cheese you've tasted: then sheep, meat, wool, which is very good and is made into carpets during the winter which is not very long. And there are whole villages which work at metals and precious stones, making silver and jewelry and inlay *kunzhals*, belts, rings and bracelets. The articles these people make are valued and known all through Russia. Unfortunately it does not bring them in very much. And then there are plenty of robbers. They raid other villages and travellers. To say nothing of the anarchists, your Honour. All that makes for quarrels. We struggle, of course, we organize patrols, but yet go and try to find that riff-raff in their eagles' nests! It's an almost impossible task. Ah, it'll take time before these people stop being savages. Shamil's prestige is a constant incentive to lawlessness. Never mind: we shall tame them!"

It was the innkeeper speaking. He had been there several years already, in his little posting inn, and providing food for the Cossacks who watched over the government-owned horses and over the travellers.

The road we were travelling on was called the Georgian Strategic Highway, and it really was very fine. What a titanic work it must have been, almost a hundred years ago, building up the embankments and tunnelling into the very mountains. I was still too small to notice it then; but afterwards I travelled over the mountains four or five times on this route with my father, and grew fonder of the road each time.

Besides, the older I grew, the more passionately I fell in love with nature in this part of the world, and with the legends of the country. Heaven knows there were plenty of them, and very beautiful ones. Later on, during other expeditions, in summer, while my father dozed, lulled by the swaying of the coach, I gazed at the wild beauty of the countryside, and came to absorb it and to understand it better. It was the country of light from sunrise to sunset; but the evening, which fell suddenly, unlocked unimaginable fairylands of colour.

The road ran at times between two walls of rock. A thick mist rose, morning and evening, from the deep black ravines and obscured the landscape, but the sun, with the help of the wind, succeeded in scattering the mists, and then it was like a curtain rising on a magic spectacle. Sometimes the rocky walls approached each other so closely that the way became narrow and dangerous for the broad coach. At one place it made an abrupt turn, and passed under a huge rock, and the driver had to hold the horses in with all his might to keep the coach upright, the slope fell away so suddenly. The place was known as "The Devil's Finger - and God see me safely past!" Right down below, between one rocky bank and the other, a narrow, perilous river, the Terek, hurled itself madly, passionately, along. Further on the walls of rock receded, the way between them grew broader, it was lighter and one breathed again.

I still remember raising my head at a moment like this towards the last glow which the sun cast upon the great grey wall. In a second the rock, red and pink, turned mauve and grey, and then suddenly dark and sinister. Night falls quickly in the mountains. I loved these moments. The horses knew the road, they were sure of themselves and galloped into the darkness. They could scent the nearness of an *aul*, of rest and food. The cries of night birds were heard, and the faraway barking of dogs. The clamour of the Terek was now no more than a murmur which little by little became inaudible. It was black night when we entered the yard of the posting-station; there was only a miserable lantern hanging on the wall. One must be used to it, and have good eyes, if one was not to break one's neck before reaching the *aul*; but the horse is indeed an extraordinary animal. It was our horses, and they alone, which had miraculously brought us to the village.

On the next day we set out again, still with our escort. At one moment we passed the bank of the Terek, in front of the ruins of a castle which, so people said, had belonged a hundred years before to

a Georgian queen, Tamara, a great queen if ever there was one, a lover of the arts, a friend of artists and poets and very beautiful. She was also a lover of men, yet in her cruelty, not wishing to be bound to anyone, used to cast her lovers by night out of a window of the castle into the fearful waters of the Terek. The corpses, carried away by the torrent, rolled about by the waves, were cast up far away, disfigured and unrecognizable. But for all Tamara's cruelty the people remember her kindly—she was brave, intelligent—and so very beautiful! Georgian poets have often sung of her charms, and those of our great Russian poets who stayed in the Caucasus, like Lermontov and Pushkin, have echoed the legend and have extolled in their poems the beauties of this country and its queen.

Of all ways of travelling I have always preferred a coach. My father eventually came to prefer a train, where he could stretch out his legs, and sleep peacefully, and need not always be on the alert and ready to use his rifle, in case of an alarm, although nothing serious ever happened to us while we were travelling among the mountains. Later on I got used to the train myself, and began to enjoy the variety of chance acquaintances, which helped to pass the time amusingly. My father liked his comfort, and on journeys he used to take a little samovar, cushions, blankets and sheets. I remember a time when he brought eight carrier-pigeons in the carriage, which he was taking from Warsaw to Tiflis. This was strictly forbidden, but no one took any notice. The pigeons walked about freely—only in the evening my father used to "arrange" them in their box. All the same, I remember feeling somewhat uneasy the whole journey.

Let me go back to where I left off. After two days and two nights we had left the high mountains and now, driving over the plain and skirting another river, the Kura, we approached Tiflis. After so many years I still have a vivid memory of that first sight of the town. Night was falling and the coach was spanking along over the wide, firm road. On each side of it there was an expanse of fields, big gardens and vineyards. The proud mountains had given place to hills, but they still lay in the background, apparitions of danger and mystery. Before us, among hills and lying at the foot of a mountain, Mount David, was Tiflis; one after another the lamps were being lit. The sky was still pink and green above the town, but was quickly darkening. A murmur met us, the murmur of the city mingled with the river. The horses' bells tinkled gaily, and from time to time the postilion called out some-

thing in his own language. By now we had only three horses drawing us, and our escort had left us when we were past the mountains. As always at such times I was burning with fever, brought on by restlessness and the excitement. My father patted my flaming cheeks.

"Here we are, pigeon. One more moment and we shall be able to go to sleep in real, clean beds, after we've had a bite to eat. And tomorrow a new life begins. Are you glad?"

* * *

I should find it very hard to give a full, sincere and honest idea of what our life at Tiflis was like, it was so complicated. Today, when some dozens of years have passed and my father is dead, I wonder how he can have lived for so long a communal life which for him presented nothing but difficulties and misfortunes. My father was weak, and his weakness destroyed many victims - himself among them, finally.

I I

BUT NOW HERE WE ARE GETTING OUT AT TIFLIS IN 1898. WE spent several days at a hotel, a big hotel, waiting for suitable rooms to be found for my father, which would take all the furniture from Cheboksary. Then, one fine day, Father told me that we were going to call on a family who had several rooms free and were looking for tenants. He made me dress carefully in honour of this visit, and remained a pretty long time in front of the looking glass himself; then we took a cab. I have forgotten the name of the street, but I can still see the big yard, with a garden at one side, where one was not allowed to go, and the vast, two-storied house in the shape of a U. I can also remember the long, wide balcony which ran all along one side of the house.

It was spring and already hot. When we arrived almost the whole family was on the balcony drinking tea. My father was always very fond of tea of every kind. I remember feeling very ill at ease, intimidated by all these people who talked to us and handled me. There was a lady of thirty-five there, a Mme Golovashkin, very talkative and gay,

with a fresh, round face, thick lips and rather big teeth. M. Golovashkin, her husband, was a good-looking man, with black eyes that blinked nervously; his black moustache was carefully trimmed, and he had curly, dark hair. His old mother, short and with a big stomach, and hair black and curly like her son's, was also there. I heard later that they were both Georgians, while the son's wife was a Russian. There was also another gentleman, the old lady's younger son. Then there were three young girls, to whom I was introduced: Zhenya, the eldest, was sixteen or seventeen, and was the image of her mother. She was lively and a great talker. The second, Yuliya, was timid and reserved, dark, with big, black eyes and beautiful hair. Sonya, the youngest, was perhaps ten or eleven, and very pretty. Lastly there was a small boy of my own age, Kolya, who was sulky with me at once and was spoilt, like every only son submerged among daughters.

The introductions over, my father explained that he was alone, with a child on his hands, and that he was looking for rooms with a family to whose care he could entrust his little girl, "Manya, here." His work, he said, would take up a lot of his time to begin with. Perhaps he would often have to be away for several days running; and he would like to know whether the family would welcome himself and his beloved daughter, a child who suffered from having no mother and who badly needed an ampler education than she had been receiving up till then. . . . I think my father talked far too much!

We went to look at the rooms. My father could have the use of three and the balcony. He might be assured that everything would be done to make happy the life of such a nice little girl, a deprived, poor thing, of education and of a mother's tenderness.

I think I have recapitulated the scene well enough.

I saw that my father was gay and beaming, very pleased with everything. He tapped me gently on the cheek, smoothed my hair and did all he could to persuade me that I might feel confident. I should be living with this family, but he would be there; I should be treated like a child of the house. It might happen that I should even sleep with them: this would be more convenient, since my father would often have to be away, and he did not want to leave me alone as he had before.

Everything was agreed upon, including the price. As well as the rooms my father paid the full *pension* for the two of us. The moving in and arranging of our furniture took several days. Our apartments

comprised a drawing room, a study-cum-office and my father's bedroom. The drawing room was ordinary and to my taste: sofa, comfortable armchairs, the other chairs rather frail. The general colour scheme was wine-red. There was a big, handsome carpet on the floor, which my father had bought from Tatars at Cheboksary, the two doors and the walls were also hung with carpets, there were cabinets and a tall lamp-stand with a red shade. Our landlord and landlady found this very fine. Their own furniture was much simpler.

The study-cum-office, which had a right to my preference, was really most peculiar. My father had had sent from Russia some country furniture which included, in particular, bridge tables, round tables, stools, also round, and great armchairs of wood carved in the shape of the *duga*¹, with arms formed by two big axes. On the *duga* the artist had carved a Russian proverb *Tishe yedesh, dalshe budesh* – more haste, less speed. But what made this furniture so amusing and so rare was that when one sat down it tended to cling lovingly, since the lacquer could not hold out against the warmth of the body, or, more precisely, of the behind, so one had to forearm one-self with cushions. In spite of this I became extremely fond of the study, with its carpets on the floor and the walls, its what-nots holding tobacco jars, glasses, cups, boxes of cigars, the room and the furniture being painted and decorated in the same style. On one of the walls my father had arranged a panoply of his guns and rifles, both antique and modern, his pistols of every make and calibre, a number of horsewhips (he had some very good ones), boxes for his bear shoots, and skis. They made a very fine show. There were also animal trophies – stuffed birds, black and white bear-skins, sealskins and deer hides and, as coat-hangers, hatracks and candlesticks, antlers and horns all over the place. (By the way, when my father looked for the skin of my bear cub, the box, when it was opened, disclosed only a handful of maggots, swarming in a heap of black hairs – and that was that – of course, it had been travelling for three months.)

In my father's bedroom there was a big bed, with two icons of Christ and a small Holy Virgin, a wardrobe, a bookcase well supplied with fine encyclopaedias and every kind of book about "the history of man", zoology and botany, a dressing table; a *chaise-percée* – yes! a *chaise-percée*, as in the good old times, another table with a big looking glass and many bottles of eau-de-cologne and other scents –

¹ The shaft-bow which runs from one shaft to the other, above the horse's withers.

the reader will have grasped already that my father was very much of a dandy. Lastly, there were, scattered about, a good many of those pretty boxes and medicine cupboards that he made himself during the long evenings at Cheboksary.

I 2

I SAW MY FATHER ONLY IN THE MORNINGS AND AT MEAL-TIMES — if that: he was very often out, and came back only when I was already in bed in the Golovashkins' flat. During the early days there I felt very much an exile and was very fretful at being constantly separated in this way from my father. But children get used to anything. I enjoyed comparative freedom. I could anyhow see my father when I wanted to, and climb on his knee, as in the old days, and chat to him. For me they were the best moments in the day. My hair grew long, and I had pretty frocks with flounces, and silk sashes with big bows at the back. The little wild girl, the half-boy, was gradually turning into a little lady. My father often teased me in front of everybody by asking whether I still wanted to be suckled by my cow.

We adapted ourselves little by little to this new style of existence, and I could see that my father was gay and contented. For our happiness things might have remained like this for a long time; but life, they say, always undertakes to poison people's existence. Mine, my existence, had hardly begun, and already I was regretting being alive.

Golovashkin, if he was not a bad man, was none the less a regular satyr. A short time after we were settled in, he began to persecute me and pursue me everywhere. I avoided the hateful man as well as a child can. He had hardly come home from his Ministry of Finance when the persecution would begin. I counted the hours till my father's return, and as soon as he was back I would run for refuge into his arms, without daring to tell him the truth — out of shame, alas! and also out of pity for him. I knew that if I told him he was capable of anything, even the worst, I suppose, remembering his violence to the servants.

This meant that there was only one recourse left to me: to be out of

the house as much as possible. So when he was not there I took advantage of the yard, and spent as much time in it as I could. But our horrid old man pointed out to his wife that I played with the boys too much, and that it was not proper. At once the lady, whom I called "aunt", deprived me of this freedom. So that I was forced to play on the balcony. When the Golovashkin children were there, it might be all right; but most of the time some of them were doing their college homework, and others were out visiting friends. There remained only the little boy, who was unbearable – unkind and jealous over everything. And inevitably there were moments when I was alone and my satyr was at home. He would rub against me, tickle me, kiss me, becoming more pressing each time. At night I would start out of my sleep, paralysed with fright. Something warm and hairy was travelling over my body – his hair and moustache. The first time I was too terrified to do anything: I could only pretend to be asleep. During the day I felt so ashamed that I could not raise my eyes to his face. I choked back my tears, and told myself that it would be better to be dead. How could I let my father know about this? I could find neither the courage nor the words to do it.

Once, in a fury, I gave him a great kick full in the face and snarled: "I'll tell Papa!" For fear I should wake one of his daughters who slept in the same room he never paid this sort of visit again, but during the day, and especially in the afternoon and evening, he followed me everywhere, as an animal trails its prey. I brought out all the ruses against him that a child can command, but he had strength and patience. When I was seven I asked my father to send me to the *lycée*: I wanted to learn my lessons, as the other girls in the house did, and also to escape the wicked man in this way. No one noticed anything (or they refused to notice: I do not know), but I was none the less convinced that everyone took me for a vicious chit, marked with God knows what mark. My savagery increased; my violence turned it to account. I rebelled against everyone, thinking that they were accomplices of Golovashkin. Sometimes family quarrels broke out, and the grandmother, or Yelena Kirillovna, the young wife, or the children would prompt me: "You know, Manya, you ought to tell Papa to be quiet: he's so fond of you, he'll listen to you." And to make peace among them I would go and find my enemy, my tormentor.

"Uncle," I entreated him, "don't shout any more, I beg you. . . . You give me a headache."

And as if by magic he would stop shouting. This sort of episode made me reflect, and showed me that even at seven I exercised some power over this man, who was clearly abnormal. I realized at once that this gave me a means of defence.

Things went on like this till I was eight, perhaps nine. That is, they went from bad to worse. My character became more and more sullen. Out of the house I was gay and a giddy fool, but as soon as I was back at home I changed completely. I was on my guard at once, I must struggle and use my cunning. I remember praying to God that He would save poor me from this monster's hands. The fact is that he lay in wait for me in every dark corner, on the balcony and even in my father's room, if Papa was out. He had no hesitation in pursuing me even into the room with the icons in it. There remained only the lavatory, and sometimes I would lock myself in there for a long time with a book, which made everyone scold me.

I grew thinner, and taller too. My father understood nothing of the change that was taking place in me. I remember a day when we went to the photographer's because my father wanted to send photographs of us to my grandparents. When I saw myself in the picture I was struck by my sad, sickly looks. My father was struck, too, and asked if I was happy, whether I was not ill. When I answered, Yes, I was happy, he said: "I shall send you to the country. Yes, the country – that's what you need."

And he suggested to Yelena Kirillovna that she should go and stay in a village in the mountains, with her children and me. This move filled me with gladness, although my father was not to join us until later on, and only for a few days, because of his work. I was happy to be leaving that house.

So we left one day in a big *arba* – a long, two-wheeled vehicle drawn by a pair of oxen. We took with us sacks of potatoes and a heap of other provisions, mattresses, bedclothes, cushions, a whole battery of saucepans and the samovar. The village was a real mountain village. We had two rooms for everything: it was all we had been able to find that was habitable. There were no amenities and no lighting; but we had brought a paraffin lamp and some candles. It was a truly rustic life. Everyone was gay: we took it in turns to pick vegetables and to wash up. We cooked in the yard, on wood embers, just like the peasants. It was harvest time and the corn was threshed as soon as it was brought in. On a big threshing-floor the ears were spread out, and two

oxen walked in a circle dragging behind them a big plank with stones or pieces of iron fixed beneath it. People stood or sat on the plank to give it more weight, and guided the oxen by means of reins. In this way the grain was separated from the straw.

I adored this, and I spent hours going round on the plank. Sometimes I slipped and fell, and then the oxen would go calmly on, dragging me in the straw. When the threshing was done, we took shovels and flung the corn up into the air. It was the wind's business to carry away all the chaff, and the corn was sacked up at once. We worked for the pleasure of working. Everyone was in good spirits and sang. In the evenings we were invited to drink some tart country wine, which made me giddy at once. We were given mountain bread and excellent goat's milk cheese.

When my father joined us, with Golovashkin, he thought I looked splendid and that the country had done me untold good. As for me, I was resolved to defend myself in future, and the effect of my father's words was that I believed that I really had changed, and for several weeks thought that I had acquired a store of moral strength.

One evening when we were all already in bed (the men slept on the balcony) the dogs not far away from us suddenly set up a furious barking.

"Wolves," said my father.

"No, a jackal," Golovashkin replied.

"Wait a second: you'll see. . ."

We listened. The dogs were quiet for the moment, but suddenly, far away, a shout was heard: "Help, for the love of God!"

"What did I tell you? Wolves! It's wolves!" my father cried. "Quick! let's dress and be off!"

In no time at all he had put on his trousers and a shirt, seized his rifle and, followed by our host, was hurling himself into the street, where several Georgian mountaineers had already gathered to go after the wolf.

A few seconds later the calls rang out again, more heart-rending than ever. Then everything fell silent once again.

"Poor wretch: they've got him," said my father. "Hurry up! We may still get there in time."

They disappeared, swallowed up by the night. I trembled in all my limbs, for my father and for the other wretch that the wolves had perhaps already torn to pieces.

Day was beginning to dawn when my father, Golovashkin and the villagers came back exhausted. The beast had escaped, but they had found the body of a mountaineer who had lost his way.

"We'll go back there this evening," my father said.

The next night they did in fact sight the wolf and shoot it. It was a big grey one.

This incident had made such an impression on us that Yelena Kirillovna and all we children screamed and said we wanted to go back to Tiflis. This is, indeed, what happened, but God knows, all the same, how much I regretted the village and the simple, healthy life among people for whom I felt nothing but fondness.

Besides, it was not long before I began again to feel the pangs of jealousy. I sensed that something was going on between Yelena Kirillovna and my father. It was not that my father dropped any of his customary correctness of behaviour, but I knew him well, and it was not long before I noticed that he had begun bringing home fox pelts for Madame; and he would take tickets for the theatre for her and her husband — and go with them. Picnics were more frequent, and my father was gay and witty, and played the fool, as they had never seen him do before. He paid less and less attention to me, and I think that was the real cause of my jealousy — I was quite ill with it. The change which I saw in him absorbed my other feelings so much that I was able to be more brutal in ridding myself of my satyr.

"If you go on, I'll tell my father all about it," I found the courage to shout at him one day when he was putting his arms round me. "I've had enough, do you understand? I'm fed up with it all!"

And I began crying and dashing to the ground everything I could lay my hands on — this was happening in my father's study. The creature left the room without a word. From then on he contented himself with devouring me with his eyes from a distance. All the same, when I fell ill with pleurisy, it was he who rubbed my back with iodine, and changed my compresses and took my temperature. His wife was apparently too busy running the house; although she had a good cook, she often went to supervise her. There were usually nine of us at table, but we often had guests, and then we were twelve or fourteen.

While I was ill my father came to look after me when he was free, but his time was much taken up too. His position at Tiflis had much changed. He had become a society man: his acquaintance increased, and his social obligations grew in proportion. From our first year there

he had invited people to the house. I still remember the gay evening parties, the rooms full of people, bridge and suppers after the casino or the theatre. During my illness I turned all this over in my mind, and I could not help thinking that it was a great change, and that my father was changing too.

When the children had no homework to do they would go to see one of their uncles, and while I was ill I was left alone with the grandmother and the inevitable Golovashkin. Since I found him repellent I would have refused to let him tend me and to see me half naked in bed, but I was weakened by the illness, there was no one else, and I was compelled, much against my will, to accept the odious man's attention. And heaven knows he did what he could to make me like him. He would sit beside my bed with his guitar and sing beautiful songs in a low voice. I must say I enjoyed that. I shut my eyes and listened, but I would have preferred to have my father by my sick bed, and him I hardly saw at all.

13

I RECOVERED, BUT THE CLIMATE OF TIFLIS SEEMED TO BE having the opposite effect on me from what my father had hoped: rather than blossoming out I spent nearly all the time in bed, or at least indoors. The pleurisy was one of a procession of every imaginable illness, and I suffered also from frequent, sharp attacks of appendicitis.

I attended the same college as Yelena Kirillovna's daughters and, although I worked well during the first few years, when I was fifteen I lost the taste for study, my life at home was intolerable, and to this were added the troubles of puberty. All that saved me from neurasthenia and despair was my father's permission to take a course at an academy of art, and I spent all my spare time drawing, painting or reading. I suffered from shyness, from an inferiority complex, which I attribute to the persecutions of the servants at Cheboksary and of Golovashkin, that evil satyr, here in Tiflis.

My father was heedless and selfish but although, being often away,

he did not realize what a miserable life I was living with the Golovashkins, he did sometimes notice that I looked sick or sad, and would take me out with him shooting or on his forestry inspections, as in the past. We would spend the night, perhaps with a friend or two, in a forestry hut, and what wonderful tales they would tell – funny or frightening. I loved those evenings

We went for expeditions into the mountains too; the whole Golovashkin family in an *arba* drawn by plodding oxen, with an awning of carpets against the heat or rain of summer, and my father and I on horseback (The other girls could not ride, and this made me feel very proud of myself) I particularly remember going with my father to see the monastery of St John, the biggest of such ruins in the Caucasus. It had once been the richest of the Georgian monasteries, and had sheltered behind the imposing pile of its high wall three thousand cells carved out of the rock. Now they were like the abandoned nests of birds, and only eight or ten monks remained. We heard Mass sung by the monks according to the Greek rite in the remains of the chapel with its striking Byzantine frescoes and mosaics, after that we went for a mad scramble among the rocks and ruins. We went into some of the cells and were amazed to find that the whole monastery was a regular necropolis, and that they contained skulls, bones – sometimes lying on the bare ground – lecterns, *prie dieu* and the remains of books, whose parchment bindings had resisted the decay of time and still contained a few yellowed pages. My father, like a mischievous schoolboy, picked up a jawbone that was lying about and put it in his pocket. We got down by sliding (crawling on all fours and tobogganing on our behinds). It made me happy to see a father so agile and so youthful.

We supped with the monks on vegetable soup in a long, vaulted hall, half underground, lit by primitive oil lamps. The monks did not speak Russian, and our ox-driver guide interpreted for us. He told us among other things that in a corner of the garden grew a rose tree which had blood red roses. It grew on the spot where St John, the founder of the monastery, had been decapitated. When the Turk had cut off his head a great quantity of blood had been spilt and had soaked the ground, the head had been buried on the spot, and some time afterwards a rose tree, covered with marvellous roses, had sprung spontaneously from the earth, since which time it had never ceased to bloom. After sleeping in the open air on hay and carpets, we went

next day to see the sacred rose tree: there really were magnificent roses hanging from the branches of its tall trunk.

On our departure we left some money for the chapel – the monks would accept none for themselves. So strong was the impression that this visit had made upon us that we rode back almost in silence.

I 4

I HAVE SPOKEN OF MY FATHER AND YELENA KIRILLOVNA. AT thirty-five, in spite of having had five children (the eldest had died), she had kept her freshness and impulsiveness. Her mother was the daughter of a Cossack officer, and she herself had much of the Cossack woman about her, being lively, despotic, perhaps even passionate; but with age she became peevish and madly jealous. For the first few years after our arrival all went well: my father was in a delightful mood and Yelena Kirillovna blossomed out in long gowns of pistachio green or canary yellow, covered with flounces and ribbons. Her daughters would laugh mockingly and her old mother-in-law sadly shake her head. I remember having several times seen Babushka, as I called her, beating her bosom before the icon and the oil lamp burning there, and crying out in Georgian: "Oh, God, oh, God, call me back to Thyself! Let me be no longer present at this shame!" I did not yet understand of what shame she was speaking.

As the years passed, however, my father tired of the woman, without her tiring of him, and it was then that hell began, for the family and for me. Poor Yelena Kirillovna! Today perhaps I could be sorry for her, as in those days I was sorry for Father; but then, as she became a veritable Fury to me, I could not help detesting and despising her. I had escaped from her husband's hands to fall into hers, and it was the more terrible because it lasted for years – in fact, until I left for Moscow, when I was eighteen.

She would deal out blows at random among her daughters, and beat them with a shoe; even her adored son did not escape. Me she did not dare to strike: her desire was to humiliate and degrade me, I

would lock myself, trembling all over, in Father's study, after she had chased me with a pair of scissors or flung an iron at my head – for of course she did such things only when he was away. How could one work in such an atmosphere?

I should say that four years after our arrival Yelena Kirillovna had a baby, a girl, who was called Raïssa. The mother, who in their daily quarrels called her husband "the unconscious cuckold", was always dropping hints about Father; but was Raïssa my half-sister? I am bound to say she did not look in the least like Father. She was very sweet, but this did not save her, as she grew bigger, from her mother's mad rages. One day – she had spilt some ink on her apron or something – her mother began beating her on the head with a slipper, while the poor lamb wept and yelled with fright. The rest of the family said nothing and did nothing, so I took the good woman by the shoulders, shook her, took away her slipper and then seized her by the throat and shouted that the next time she laid a finger on Raïssa I should twist her neck for her. Raïssa rushed to defend her mother, and the rest of the family were dumbfounded at seeing me in this entirely new light. Yelena Kirillovna calmed down, and said nothing to me; but she gave Father her own version of the story. Father forbade me to interfere in the family's quarrels, and some time later he told me I was becoming hysterical, like Yelena Kirillovna.

"That is only too true," I said. "It is high time I left this house. Tell me, now, tell me truly: am I really your daughter? For the other day that woman spat in my face and said I was nothing but a poor bastard – not even your child, but the daughter of a Jewish streetwalker, and you hadn't the courage to admit it to me. I beg you to tell me the truth, about myself and about Raïssa, too."

Father went white and for some moments he kept his eyes shut. Then he put his hand on my head, and said in a voice which was frankness itself: "This is the truth. I have no other daughter but you, and you know how I love you. Would you like us to leave here at once and go and live somewhere else?"

I kissed him and promised to be good until I had finished my studies.

THERE WAS A BOY CALLED SASHA (ALEXANDER) OF FOURTEEN or fifteen - though one would have said he was older because he was so tall. He was extremely handsome, a Georgian of the purest type. We used to play with other boys of his age and mine, at pirates, at cops and robbers, at hide and seek. In spite of my age and short stature, they did me the honour of treating me like a boy, since I could run fast and fight with wooden *kinzhals* - very sharp ones. I never cried and never told tales, I was a good sport, and my father's reputation and position, moreover, protected me from being bullied or teased. I much preferred Sasha, the Georgian, to any of the Russians by whom I was surrounded. I was romantic, and positively enchanted by the dresses, the dances, the songs and the legendary past of Georgia. Father swore he would marry me to a Georgian prince, of whom there were plenty all over the place. Nothing in Sasha's behaviour could have led me to expect what he did: he wrote me a letter which he got our cook's daughter to give me. She brought it under her apron and I shut myself up in Father's study to read it, much enjoying the mystery of the whole affair. There was a coloured picture of two clasped hands in a bouquet of roses and pansies. The words were very simple: "I admire you, Manya, for your intelligence, your vivacity and your talents. You are not like the other girls I know. Meet me behind the house at nine o'clock. I have a great surprise for you. Till this evening, without fail. I love you very much. Sasha." My heart leaped with joy - not at the idea of the surprise, for I cared nothing for that, but that he should admire my talent! That was what I liked - my talent! But I did not go. I felt sure he would try to kiss me, I hid the letter and I avoided him. After all, it might have been some trick. In fact another letter from Sasha was intercepted by Yelena Kirillovna. I never saw it, but the house was full all day of whispering behind my back, and I had a presentiment of disaster. The next day, as soon as Father had gone, she called me and said that she knew everything and that it was not worth while to lie or to play the virtuous saint.

"And now I'm going to send for everybody at once, Sasha's uncle and aunt and grandfather and grandmother, and I'm going to give you a beating you won't forget in a hurry."

And indeed I shall remember the scene all my life.

She took me into my father's study, as it would be the most impressive setting and would allow her to show herself the sole mistress of everything in it, including me.

There was a crowd of people in the doorway, and I stood by the sofa, like a prisoner in the dock. She told me to confess everything. Confess what? I knew nothing. There was only a letter I had hidden; I had not even gone to the rendezvous.

"I have two of Sasha's letters," she said, "and he will be punished like you."

"What two letters?"

She answered that Babushka had found one where I had hidden it, and that Nastyia, the cook's daughter, had given the other to her mistress instead of to me. So the old grandmother had given me away! But I remembered it once that the poor old lady had never been to school and could not read, so I forgave her. I could see her standing by the door and shaking her head.

"Ask forgiveness before everyone, or you shall taste this whip."

I did not know whose forgiveness to ask, nor for what I had done nothing wrong. I looked her in the eye and made no reply.

Look at the impudent creature! What insolence! Undo your drawers, princess, and lie down here!"

"Aren't you ashamed?" I asked.

"That's enough insolence, you wretch. Ask forgiveness, quickly, or look out for yourself!"

I undid my drawers and took them down, still staring her in the eye. A lot I cared for all the others and for Sasha and the whole stupidity.

"One day you'll be sorry for what you're doing now. If Papa knew."

"Oh, don't worry. I shall tell him."

"You can tell him your lies, but I can tell him a thing or two as well. And one thing I'm sure of is that Papa won't stay a moment longer in this house when he knows. Now, beat me if you want to."

I threw myself face down and pulled up my skirt. I was trembling all over, not at the idea of the pain, but with indignation. Showing my behind was for me like putting out my tongue. I should have liked to shout to all those people how her husband had humiliated me for years. What were those letters compared with that? Where was the wrong?

She struck me several times with a Cossack whip, as hard as she could.

"Ask forgiveness! Ask forgiveness!"

I did not open my lips. I only wished my father had been there; perhaps I was paying for him, for she would never have dared to avenge herself on him.

"That's enough, Yelena Kirillovna. After all, she's only a child," said Sasha's parents. "We're sure she won't do it again."

They all went away, the grandmother going last and looking at me pityingly.

I got up and started putting my clothes in order. The tears of shame and fury, which I had held back, now began to flow.

"So you wouldn't ask forgiveness, then? I don't care about that: you didn't look particularly proud in that position. If you could have seen yourself with your behind in the air! A pity that Sasha who admires you so didn't see you either."

And she laughed evilly.

"You're an ugly, wicked woman," I said, putting my hair to rights. "You can tell my father what you please, but let me tell you, if I told him I didn't want to stay here any longer we should leave tomorrow. Do you hear? Tomorrow. And now get out. This is my father's room."

She did not quite know what I was talking about, but she felt I might say something to Father which would induce him to leave the house and she started weeping, which was the way in which her crises of sadistic madness always ended. She was the victim now, misunderstood, whose devotion neither Father nor I appreciated. Poor man! If he knew what a snake he was nursing in his bosom! She was choking with rage and impotence. I knew enough, even at my age, to see that she was dying of jealousy and humiliation. Yes, indeed, I was paying for another's sins.

The next day Father sent for me when I came back from the *lycée*.

"What's going on, Manya?" he asked gently.

I told him the whole story, and swore that I was innocent.

He put his hand on my head and said:

"If you really love me, you must try not to hurt me."

"Of course, Papa; but it's not always easy to know what's good and what's bad."

The incident was closed. Father said we should go and stay for a short time at Lodz with my grandparents. Yelena Kirillovna was much grieved at this, but she made me some frocks with her own hands, weeping all the time, and went so far as to say that she was sorry about

the famous beating (the second I had had in my life). Clearly she now wanted me for an ally.

* * *

I continued to work at the academy, and at the *lycée* my pictures, shown at an exhibition of children's work, were much talked of. One day Father showed me an article in a newspaper – with a laugh, but I could see how pleased he was – which spoke of an excellent twelve-year-old artist, Marie Stebel-ska, who possessed a lively imagination and genuine talent: it was to be hoped that she would become a real artist.

"I shall show them this article at Lodz," said Father.

The director and some of the professors were always asking me how I did my work, and why my drawings were often so morbid. Monsters, devils and corpses were continually turning up in them. One of these drawings, I remember, showed a witches' sabbat in a forest, with great tall trees all round. All kinds of monsters hung swinging from the branches, and a mad farandole of witches and devils stretched out through the clearing. Unfortunately, among the characters our directress could be plainly recognized in a thin, dry woman who was dancing and kicking up her fleshless legs, and our director, a gross German, was there, disguised as a corpulent devil accompanied by a little naked girl (his daughter); and our professor of Russian literature and all our other masters, sucked into the infernal round. I had not noticed anything, myself, to begin with, but, when I hung the drawing on the wall the likenesses sprang out in the full truth of caricature. Some of my subjects took it well, the director among others; but not the directress, and my professor of literature wanted to know why I had done it. I answered that I had been much influenced, in a general way, by Gogol, Pushkin and the tellers of folk-tales, and that the characters had gushed from me independently of my will and with no feeling of malice: my father appeared in the farandole, astride a broom, and I was perched in a tree, decked with a long tail.

The drawing was an instant success, and everyone began to take an interest in my work. It seemed that art was to be my true career.

It was at the academy that I saw nude models for the first time, men and women. Alas, I was not allowed to work directly from the life; I had to begin with plaster casts, like anyone else. I protested: there were as many plaster models as I wanted at the *lycée*; what interested me was drawing from life. I straight away asked the Golovashkin girls

to pose for me, and I did a nude torso of Kolya, too. I exhibited this collection of drawings, and you should have heard the exclamations. And where had I found the models for these nudes?

The consequence was that, at my director's request, I was allowed to work from the life at the academy. What joy and satisfaction I found in this work! I am sure it saved me from neurasthenia, perhaps, even, at certain moments, from hysterical dementia. Unfortunately, thanks to my anxiety over my father and my own attitude both towards him and towards the Golovashkin family, my other work went from bad to worse, except for the subjects I liked – literature, geography and history.

The *pope* would ask "Who was Jesus Christ? Stebelska, you answer."

I would answer something or other, mangling what one of my neighbours prompted me with, for I had been drawing, of course.

"Jesus Christ was a Christian."

"Very good. Come out here, my girl!"

And he would send me behind the blackboard, and I would draw with chalk on the back of it a picture in which Death and the Devil most often made their appearance. At the end of the lesson he would tell me to turn the board round and show what I had been doing.

"You're quite irrational – even diabolical," he told me. "You'll need a long spoon, you know."

He was still muttering as he went out, but he added none the less.

"Still, you can draw. Work! Go on working!"

It will show my innocence – and ignorance – at this time when I say that just as we were leaving for Lodz Yelena Kirillovna whispered to me "Tell your father to buy me a baby in Poland. They say there are such pretty ones, all pink, with fair hair. Here they're all dark. Don't forget."

I was enchanted with the idea, but Father laughed a good deal when I told him. I expect he was surprised at my naïvety in some things when in others I was so well informed. In fact, at bottom, I was quite pure, and felt no attraction to either men or boys.

WHEN WE CAME BACK FROM POLAND WE FOUND THE GOLOVASHKINS in a different house. Besides this there were other changes: they had fewer visitors, and the gaiety of the first years had waned. I noticed that Yelena Kirillovna was wearing more ample frocks, and one day she said to me:

"I think I shall soon be buying a baby."

Kolya said I must be an awful fool if I believed fairy-tales like that.

"Do you really not know how babies come into the world?"

"No."

"Where do you think they come out, then? By the ear, or through the leg?"

I hankered to know; but, while I wished to know the truth, I was revolted by the vulgarity of the boy's expression.

"Are you sure that you know?" I retorted.

"You've seen a cock mount a hen, haven't you, stupid? And a tom-cat and a she-cat? And two dogs stuck together? That's when they're making love. And then the child comes out, like an egg out of the backside of a hen. . . . You! I know of that business about your love-letters from Sasha: I think you're just sly."

I was amazed and revolted by this explanation of conception and birth. I might have read a lot, but at twelve I was still very ignorant. After this conversation I searched Father's library till I found a big book, about mothers and babies, with fine, coloured pictures, which told the whole story, from the little chick in the egg to the child's sojourn in its mother's womb. I devoured it greedily, but a false modesty prevented my asking Father about it, or anyone else. Little by little I managed to disentangle things for myself and realized that it was neither vulgar nor brutish, as Kolya's words might have made me believe. There were moments, though, when my reading convinced me that a man and a woman could not love each other except as the animals do, and that always knocked me flat. In my despair I clung to the tale, the lie, that said that children grew out of a cabbage, a flower, or were placed on the roofs by storks, or even that they came out by the navel or the leg, as Babushka told us one day.

FIVE YEARS PASSED AND WHEN I WAS SIXTEEN OR SEVENTEEN I started going out in the evenings, and Father, although he did not, or would not, realize that I was growing up, did his best to introduce me to Georgian society, which I found so banal that I wondered he could stand it. He himself was so exhausted by his work, by malaria and by the severe piles he suffered from, that I saw it was my duty to look after him. Unlike Zhenya and Yuliya Golovashkin, who talked of nothing else, I had no thought of marriage, either then or later: I would work; I would be an artist.

I was once chaffed for wearing a red frock, and called a revolutionary, and indeed there were many revolutionary stirrings and strikes in Tiflis at this time. When the grownups were out or busy, Zhenya Golovashkin, now a schoolmistress, used to entertain nihilists and people who were going *itti v narod* (to help to educate the people). I went to her evening gatherings too, until Father begged me for his sake to keep away from the Reds. There were terrifying riots between Armenians and Tatars; Marxist propaganda was spreading in the barracks; caches of rifles or explosives might be discovered anywhere.

One day, when I was returning from the *lycée* and was waiting for the front door to be opened, a man appeared close by me, followed at once by another. They were talking in the native dialect, but I could see from the look of them that they were threatening each other: guttural cries, livid faces, eyes starting out of their sockets, they were the picture of fury. I was riveted to the spot and could not move. One of them drew his dagger and plunged it into the belly of the other: I distinctly saw him turn the weapon in the wound, and then snatch it out, bringing after it a gush of blood and a lump of intestines. The frightful, raucous cry of the other made me shut my eyes, and I thought I should collapse on the ground beside him, but the door suddenly opened, a hand caught hold of me and I found myself in the vestibule. Before the door was shut I had time to see the murderer running away.

My father, from the balcony, had seen me arrive, and seen the two men quarrelling. He had come down four stairs at a time to open the door. . . . I had a terrible fit of weeping: it was the first time I had seen a man killed.

During these troubled years young people began to emancipate themselves. Some people worked for the development of the revolutionary movement, which was spreading everywhere; others used their

new liberty to enjoy life more fully. I was seventeen when I first heard of the League of Free Love. People gave cries of virtuous indignation as they told how there were several of these leagues in Tiflis already, regular debauchery clubs, it was said. There had been scandals which had compromised girls who were under age, students, who had been caught by night in the company of men — even of officers of high rank. The police discovered these rendezvous, and the press announced at once that so-and-so had been in such-and-such a place on a certain night. Some students were expelled, but young people are always the same: forbid the fruit and they rush to pick it. I knew some young girls of good family, a general's daughter among them, who boasted of belonging to these Leagues. In Paris, they said, all this was apparently quite natural, and in Moscow people were getting used to it, it was only in a provincial hole like Tiflis that people raised such a clamour for nothing.

I thought myself that there was no harm in free love, provided there was nothing to hide or to fear. Unfortunately, mystery and decent were everywhere. Young and old "gentlemen" deluded young girls, got them with child and gave them diseases. I remember the case of a girl's burning the foetus in the lavatory of my college library. The scandal was hushed up, but the young lady was asked to leave the Olga Fedorovna College at once. Such a blot could be neither tolerated nor glossed over, for fear of contagion. Poor girl! I do not know what became of her. I was told at the time that she had pursued her career in the bosom of the League of Free Love.

By this time I was quite famous at my college for the portraits I executed with pencil or brush. I was no longer a timid child, and I was determined, cost what it might, to finish with my classes in the following year, when I would be eighteen, and go to study painting seriously in Moscow — and still more to get away from the Golovashkins, for Yelena Kirillovna made such a continual hullabaloo about the house that, as the examinations drew near, her daughters and I were driven to go and work at the houses of friends. When classes were over, and after dinner, I used to go to the house of Elia, the daughter of General Tarakanov, where a small group of us used to meet to work, and then I would go home and try to work for part of the night.

I knew that Yelena Kirillovna was very superstitious: there were in the yard two pits like *oubliettes*, and when they had been opened up one day by workmen we had found an iron ring in the wall of one, with a great chain, and some bones scattered about. Father said that

perhaps some rich Georgian or Turk had had a house where ours was and had kept prisoners in the *oubliettes*, or an adulterous wife, or some poor girl who had gone wrong. At all events, I took a skull that was there and put it on my desk. I had no more trouble with Yelena Kirillovna after that, although she did say that I was bringing bad luck on the house. She said the same about an owl that Father had caught and kept in a big cage on the balcony. The bird's hoots made me jump, and so got on my nerves that one night I opened the cage and let it fly away. Father was not particularly pleased, but Yelena Kirillovna was delighted.

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In order to relax somewhat from the exhausting preparation for our examinations Elia and I had decided to take secret lessons every day in cycling, and we found by chance a fellow who consented to show us how. He lived behind an old cemetery, disused for quite fifty years. The tombs with their painted tombstones had gradually sunk into the ground, and weeds and wild flowers had spread all over them. In the distance one could see the Kura, the mountains, Tiflis and its suburbs. I do not remember how we discovered this man, who dressed like a *kinto*, an apache, in a black jacket, very tight round the waist and with wrinkled shirts, full, black Turkish trousers gathered at the ankles, flat, supple kid-skin shoes and a little black cap perched rather to one side of his skull. His face was broad and rubicund, his eyes crafty and smiling and his nose red and rather clammy.

So for a month we went to him for an hour a day, riding round on a track that he had improvised for us. It all went off very well. At first the fellow tried to joke with us, and he must have thought we looked odd in our college uniforms: a maroon frock caught in at the waist, skirt wide and rather long, a blouse and a little tippet and white collar and cuffs. He did not understand what sort of girls we could be, and he even tried vaguely to pat our behinds while he was holding the saddle of the bicycle with his huge paws; but we put a stop to that at once by telling him that our fathers were a general and an inspector of waters and forests. He took off his cap and made us a comic bow, and after that he did not dream of touching us again.

At our last lesson we wanted to give our friends a surprise, so we invited them to meet us near the old cemetery. The boys were greatly intrigued by this rendezvous, thinking that it was a curious idea to go so far to such a lonely place: it was dangerous, they said.

There was a pretty unpleasant surprise waiting for us, too. Our instructor also had invited some friends and we found a gang of men lying in the grass all round our track. They began laughing among themselves as they watched us pass quite close to them on our bicycles. In spite of all our efforts to pull them down over our knees, our skirts flew up, exposing the calf and sometimes even part of the thigh. I heard them exclaim in Georgian:

"I'd like to have that one, all right: she's got good thighs and good calves."

"No: the other one for me. She's got good, plump breasts and rump."

And they sang:

*No, I don't want to eat sunflower seeds:
What I want is to kiss Sonichka;
No, I don't want to go to the boozing haunts,
What I want is a good, fat girl to clasp.*

—in Georgian, of course. It was very funny, and I translated to Elia as it went on, and suggested that we should not stop riding round till the boys arrived.

"Get down, little ladies," called our instructor, making signals at us. "We'll drink to your health. My friends think you ride like champions."

"What if the boys don't come?" we asked each other.

"Oh," I said, "we'll throw the bicycles into the ravine; they'll run to find them, and meanwhile we'll run off at full speed."

But the five boys suddenly turned up, amazed to see us riding round as fast as we could, surrounded by a small group of *kintos* lounging in the grass, following us with their eyes and laughing and gesticulating.

"A surprise: I should think so!" cried the boys. "Who are these sinister Romeos that are keeping you company?"

"That's just it. Come nearer and get us out of this!"

They came up: there were two or three splendid athletes among them.

"Above all be polite: don't say anything," I protested as I saw them adjust their belts and put on a provocative air.

Then, wheeling our bicycles, we came back to find our man, with the money for our lessons in our hands.

"No, young ladies, certainly not," said the instructor. "The pleasure

and the honour have been all mine. And why shouldn't these young gentlemen come too and do some pedalling? *Au revoir*: a pity you're going already."

So the gov'nor thanked us, perhaps in the hope of remaining on good terms with us and our friends. Embarrassed but pleased, we were about to go away – or rather escape – when one of the boys took our money and went back to the instructor. He shoved the coins into his hand and said: "Come on, no nonsense. Drink a glass to the health of these ladies and to their success in their exams. They do really ride very well. Bravo for you!"

He came back to us and said, "It's infinitely better like that. Everybody's pleased."

But we had hardly left our *vélodrome* when the boys gave us a wiggling:

"Do you know you might very well have got yourselves raped or murdered? That fellow's a complete blackguard: he keeps a house full of tarts on the banks of the Veri. My God, you've had a lucky escape, thanks to us."

A dispute followed, but facts were facts: we could ride a bicycle, and our fathers might be prepared to buy us one.

I went home with Kolya, and at supper he told the whole story, although I had begged him to keep our adventure to himself. The family shrieked, but Yelena Kirillovna's noise drowned all the rest.

"What have I always said? Look at her, the saint. Wasn't I right to say that she was depraved and would come to a bad end? Going off alone to visit apaches in houses frequented by abandoned women: that's a good sign! What will your poor father say?"

Poor Papa! I could not warn him, for he was away. On the next day, taking advantage of my being at college, that woman gave him her version of the business as soon as he came back. When I returned from my classes Father asked me what had happened. I answered gaily that Elia and I had wanted to give our papas a big surprise, and had learned to ride a bicycle in a very short time, but that we had never suspected that we were in danger.

Papa was silent for a moment, then he said:

"Your friend's father did not know either?"

"Of course not, *papochka*. No one knew anything. That was the surprise."

"You're brave, both of you, but, to tell the truth, you need watching."

Have you forgotten the story of Mlle Klaus? What's the good of chucking yourself into the wolf's mouth? Have you ever thought what it would be like if you came to real harm? *Ty glupenkaya* (little fool)!"

That is how my father scolded me. I thought he was very sweet, and I could not help shivering when I thought of the "real harm" that had come to my schoolmate Marusya, the daughter of the director.

She was two years older than I and engaged to be married. One afternoon, just at five o'clock, she, her young man and two other students had taken a fancy to going for a walk along the Grand Georgian Strategic Highway. Leaving the town they had gone on into the open country, over hills, gardens and fields. They had not gone very far when four or five *kintos*, who came up to them as if to start a conversation, threw themselves upon the boys, tied them up and half stunned them, and then raped the girl before their eyes. Some peasants who were driving along the road in their *arba* came upon this sight: the young men bound and black and blue with bruises, and the girl half naked and in a faint. An atrocious ordeal for Marusya and her family! My friend fell ill: her father and mother took her to Europe, where she died. I saw the director when he returned: he was so changed that it was painful to look at him. Not long afterwards he left the college: his grief had been too much for him and he had fallen ill in his turn.

Because of incidents of this sort young people were forbidden to go out of the town after ten o'clock in the evening.

18

ON THE DAY WHEN WE WERE GIVEN OUR DIPLOMAS, AT THE end of the course, I was so terribly afraid I had failed (because of the wretched life I had been living at home) that my heart felt tight and my legs seemed to be made of cotton wool. At last I heard the directress say:

"Stebelska: come up, child, and get your diploma. You should feel very happy. It has been a hard year for you, but now at last you are

free to go away and devote yourself to your beloved painting. I wish you good fortune with all my heart. Don't forget the college or our advice to you: we shall not forget you, and your drawings will remind us of you."

I took my diploma with trembling hands. The directress went away, and we began to say goodbye – to the schoolrooms where we had spent so many years, to the professors who had seen us change from children into young women, to our instructors good and bad, to all of it; and we realized then that the finest years of our youth were over. We were ready to enter life, as they say: but were we? We knew enough history, geography, algebra, physics and chemistry to pass an examination; but life: what did we know about that?

Before I left the room I had a look at my diploma, and I was astonished: it was made out in the name of Marya Vorobeva – no mention of Stebelska. I ran to my instructress and showed it to her.

"It's not my diploma, Madame. There's been a mistake and they've given me someone else's."

"Yes, it is your diploma, Stebelska. Go and find your father: he'll explain it all. Off you go, and good luck."

She shook my hand affectionately, and I rushed home, leaving all my schoolmates there, without telling them of the shock I had had.

For once I found Father at home: perhaps he was waiting for me.

"Well *rybka*, finished? Or are they keeping you at the college because they love you so?"

"Listen, Papa," I answered: "I've been given a certificate with the name of Marya Vorobëva. I don't know the name. I thought there had been a mistake and tried to refuse it. I was told you'd explain it all. I think the time has come to tell me the truth."

Tears were streaming down my cheeks into my mouth, and I could taste the bitterness of them. Father looked at me for a moment, and then took me in his arms, pressing my head to his chest; and he started to weep, too. It was the first time this had happened before me, and I was completely shaken.

I clung to him, crying my eyes out. I thought of my botched and tarnished childhood, of all the things I had had to keep to myself that he might not be hurt: and now I must leave him, go away and learn to work. I was frightened of leaving him, without me, in a house where I

was afraid of everything, afraid even of being alone in his room. Why? Why was I afraid of his empty room? Had I perhaps a presentiment of his tragic end?

Of course there were those frightful words that Yelena Kirillovna had more than once thrown in my face:

"You're not his daughter. He picked you out of the mud of the gutter; and when the time comes he'll make you his mistress. Oh, yes, all very well for you to climb on to his knee and cuddle up to him and let him see you naked . . . your mother was a Jewess: not even an artist but a whore: that's what she was. You make me sick."

I had never told Father a word of this, but the fact was that I did not sit on his knee so confidently, and I was afraid of kissing him, even before other people - afraid, too, that he might give himself away by some indecent action. That woman had made me lose confidence in the only being who was dear to me, and had ruined the regard I had for myself.

That is why I was crying my eyes out, and Father cried because he knew he was guilty, and thought he could not give me the protection he owed me. He wept also because I was his natural daughter, as he finally admitted to me.

"Listen, darling: if you were converted to Catholicism I could acknowledge you and adopt you. You would be my heir: everything could still be put right. Think it over."

So I was not like other children. I was the fruit of adultery. Perhaps my mother was a Jewish artist, converted to Christianity and married to a Russian. My father had never been married to my real mother, whom he had known, and her husband, Alexander Vorobëv, at Cheboksary; and I was of the Russian Orthodox religion from birth. The result of this imbroglio was that my father had been unable to give me his name, which was as serious for him as for me; but he had taken me with him, and had married another woman to give me a mother. On my side I had grown up in ignorance of it all - or almost, for it will be remembered that Yelena Kirillovna, in her fits of spitefulness, often called me "bastard", "Jewish whore's daughter", "girl who'll end up in a gutter", "dirty little bitch" and so on.

Cowering in Father's arms I wept with him over our cowardliness and our unhappiness. All my illusions had vanished, and I had nothing left but hope for the future: I cannot say that I looked forward to it with joy.

I thought things over, and concluded that to change my religion in the hope of a legacy would be ugly and mercenary: I should lose my pride in myself and my father's affection: so, wishing to prove my disinterested affection for him, I refused.

19

FATHER TOLD ME THAT AFTER THE HOLIDAYS I SHOULD BE leaving for Moscow: he would take me there himself, see me settled in and put me under the protection of his brother, Anton Stebelsky, who was the head of a factory making central-heating appliances, the first in Russia. Being sure, then, that my departure for Moscow was absolutely decided on, and that in two or three months I should be setting off with Father on the grand expedition, I gave a somewhat free rein to my impulses and feelings.

Among the students, officers and young Georgians who formed Zhenya's little "court" there was a boy, a student at Moscow University, who was already rather a friend of mine. He was a prince, a genuine descendant of the last kings of Georgia. Nobility and breeding could be seen in his tall stature, his walk, the way he carried his head, his behaviour and his manners. His father, Prince Amilashvari, belonged to a family that had grown poorer and poorer till it was ruined. All he had left was a few houses in the country, a little arable land and some vines, worked by a few dozen peasants, a scanty herd of cows, a hundred sheep, perhaps . . . nothing, in fact, compared with their former riches.

I did not know his parents, who lived in seclusion in the country, but I knew his uncle, a handsome man always soberly and elegantly dressed in a black *cherkeska*. Zhenya, in fact, after being in love with the nephew, Khosro, or Kay, or Kay Khosro, had been smitten by the uncle, and indulged a dream of becoming a princess, like her sister, Sonya; which induced her to bequeath me young Prince Amilashvari, who was younger than she was.

For some years, to tell the truth, we had blushed when we looked at

each other, teased each other and argued, all proofs of a growing love, still utterly innocent. One day he sent me a little note in which he declared that he loved me all too dearly, that he must have an answer at once, or he would not leave our house. I was working in my father's room, and Raïssa brought me the message hidden in a book. I was in raptures at his passionate words, and so happy to know that someone besides my father really loved me. Yet I did not answer. I remembered the lesson I had been given by Mine Golovashkin all those years before, by which my self-esteem had been so wounded; moreover, I was still spied on, and everything I did was reported to Father. Next day Kay was waiting for me at the corner of the avenue, and with a pale face asked why I had not replied or even come into the drawing room to say goodnight to him.

"Yes, of course," I said. "I love you, too but what then? It doesn't get us very far. We're not free yet and above all we're too young. Let's wait till we've finished our studies, and then go in for loving properly. . . . That will give you time to see whether you still love me, and then we can talk about it again," I added hypocritically.

"What cynicism, Manya!" he cried. "Is it really you talking like this? You who were always all flash and flame?"

"If I used all my flash and flame to fall in love with a boy who's always hidden away among girls' skirts, that'd be a pretty bad look-out. It's true I'm heart-whole at the moment; but, if we amused ourselves by going in for loving more seriously we should hurt ourselves for nothing. I love you, at least I'm afraid I do; but go on leaving me alone; don't rush me. Spend your time with other girls; I couldn't care less."

This was not true. I loved him and I was jealous of Zhenya, but I would not have admitted it for the world. I do not know how I could argue (if that is the word) in this way, when I was certain I loved him — was even painfully in love. I was already playing the feminine comedy that one learns in one's cradle.

We met nearly every evening, at home or among other students, boys and girls; we played the conventional society games, and we had a good time. We launched into grand disputes about one book or another, or such-and-such a Russian or foreign writer, and we talked politics. We were all between seventeen and twenty. Kay and I talked no more about love, but we exchanged glances and sometimes we walked hand in hand, our fingers trembling; and if we started talking

our voices shook with restrained passion. When he learned that I was to leave for Moscow, he said we should certainly have an opportunity to see each other again there, and that we should feel freer. He was interested in my work and my future, although he was always teasing me and saying that as soon as I was free I should go giddy and fall into the arms of the first cad to come along who could talk love better than he could.

Before he left for Moscow I asked him to come to see me by himself. We sat on the sofa in the drawing room and it was quite dark; only the sound of voices came to us through the dining-room door, which was open. There, for the first time, I asked him to kiss me. I had a fearful headache, after a dispute with Yelena Kirillovna and her daughters; Father was away from Tiflis, and I felt lonely and miserable. . . . He kissed me as hard as he could; his lips were dry, and his voice shook as he said:

"Wicked Many! I've been waiting for that kiss three years. But now I am holding you. I shall go to Moscow ahead of you; but that doesn't matter, since you'll be going with your father. *Au revoir*, then. Till Moscow. Be good, sorceress!" And after that first kiss he went away.

One day Yelena Kirillovna asked me to go into town with her. She went every month to see the Molokans, a queer sect who lived in a suburb of Tiflis: we were to fetch a phial of elixir for Father. The Molokan men and women used to wash their faces with cow's urine, and they were famous for the whiteness of their skin and the beauty of their hair. (It was paraffin that they used for their hair.) Apparently they knew secret remedies for curing female ailments and high fevers. This was not the first time I had gone with Yelena Kirillovna and brought back an elixir for the malaria. Father swore by hell and all the saints when he drank the mixture. I tasted it once, to please him, and at once spat out the spoonful I had taken: it was so bitter that you needed real faith to swallow it.

Sometimes my father was quickly cured after swallowing one or two phials of this bitter stuff. One day I asked Yelena Kirillovna what the liquid was composed of, and she answered with a laugh that, if my father knew, he would refuse to take even one drop. I already knew of a miraculous ointment for eczema that the Tatars made. My father suffered from eczema; it was partly all the game he ate, and partly contact with the natives who, in Russia and in the Caucasus, suffered a good deal from diseases of the skin. Father caught it, and his hands,

face and legs were soon covered with eczema. I think he had a form of nettle-rash, too: his liver was extremely tired. Anyhow, this evil-smelling ointment removed all the impurities and left his skin smooth and white. I had heard Father say that it was chiefly composed of a substance obtained from the droppings of fowls and dogs. This whitish stuff, mixed with a greasy medium when the droppings began to dry, could cure pimples and acne. Father knew the skill of the Tatars and mountain folk in miraculous cures, and in this sphere he extended to Yelena Kirillovna the confidence he had in them; at her advice he would swallow such-and-such a quantity of liquid, convinced each time that he was well on the way to being cured. He was better for a few days; then he was so ill that he had to take to his bed. During the last years of our life together I knew that he suffered horribly from haemorrhoids, and sometimes lost a terrifying quantity of blood. His life ebbed away with the blood. Each time, when he could stand on his feet again and left Tiflis on a tour of inspection, he looked like Lazarus raised from the dead. There was a great doctor I advised him to see, but in vain. •

"Bah!" he answered. "I know him: he's a charlatan. He'll forbid me to eat, to drink, to smoke, to work - and how shall we live then, eh?"

It was only now that I saw my father's tragedy clearly and understood the cause of his sickness: he was sucked dry. A secret malady was undermining him, gnawing his strength away and he let things go; for when a doctor suggested operating on him he always refused. If he had been living at this time in Poland or France or Germany, perhaps he could have been operated on properly; but at Tiflis he lacked the necessary confidence and courage: all doctors, to him, were frauds and charlatans.

20

I SHALL ALWAYS REMEMBER ONE EASTER EVE, WHEN FATHER had given me some money to buy roses for Yelena Kirillovna. I ordered a big basket of red roses, and they were delivered at the house during the morning. I told Yelena Kirillovna that they were an Easter

present from Father, but it was one of her bad days and she did not answer.

With us Russians Easter Day was a very important feast day. Eggs were dyed in different colours (and I would draw designs on them), and *kulich*i were made – buns of sweetened flour, with saffron to stimulate the taste. We stayed up all night to keep an eye on the *kulich*i in the oven. (At home there were always eight or ten, of all sizes, and if they did not rise properly it was a real catastrophe: we thought that that year's Easter had been a failure.) Great quantities of white cheese were used to make a pyramidal *paskha*, stuffed with dried raisins and almonds, the top of which was decorated with preserved fruits and surmounted by a cross. The *kulich*i were sprayed with melted sugar, which made patterns in caramel and the letters XB, a Russian cipher meaning "Christ is risen". The table was generally laden with a sucking pig, a turkey, ducks, chickens, a great ham, roast meats, a leg of lamb and every kind of *zakuski*, ornamented with many-coloured ribbons and paper frills. Of course the *kulich*i and the *paskha* had the place of honour, enthroned among the flowers and bottles of wine and vodka.

At midnight everybody went to the Russian church – usually the college chapel for us – the grownups dressed with the greatest elegance. Father looked splendid in his full-dress uniform, holding himself stiff and upright in spite of his fatigue. I was to carry a big candle, like the others following in the procession behind the *popes* in their white and gold; then came the girls in the choir. The procession made the circuit of the college, singing canticles, and bearing icons and the cross, to stop in front of the closed door of the chapel, where there was more singing. Each year I shivered when the moment came for the folding doors to be opened: it felt as though we were waiting for a miracle to happen. When the door was opened the *pope* intoned: "Christ is risen from among the dead," and all was brightness and joy. How I loved that moment: all evil seemed to disappear, and I threw my heart wide open to the infinity of forgiveness and love. When the mass was over everyone filed past the *pope* and kissed his hand; he kissed us, saying, "Christ is risen," and we answered: "Christ is risen indeed," and kissed each other. In the streets poor people and soldiers asked for the holy kiss and no one might refuse: it was as though God Himself had asked it of you, to give it back to the poor at once. Meanwhile the *pope* was blessing all the *kulich*i and *paskhi* that had been

brought to him; and then everyone went home to have some refreshment.

On the morning of the next day friends and acquaintances began to arrive, and the landlord, employees, chiefs of offices and even poor people, to drink a glass and take a bite. Eventually all these visitors went away, shaky on their legs, top hats somewhat askew, and laughing boisterously. After drinking from morning to evening – vodka, liqueurs sweet wines and so on – of course it was not easy to keep one's equilibrium. It was frightening, the amount people could eat and drink. As for me, I usually had a wonderful time, and after giving and receiving presents I would go to the theatre or the circus.

But the Easter Eve of which I spoke – my last – was rather tragic for Father and me. I thought Mme Golovashkin wore an odd scowl after I gave her the roses I had chosen for her (it was the first time that Father had not undertaken it himself). Everyone was putting the last touches to the Easter table when Yelena Kirillovna suddenly appeared with an opened box of caviare and said to me: "You can have some with your father; I believe it's excellent." It is true we were both very fond of caviare – especially the pressed black sort; so I took the box and three spoons and some slices of bread and butter, and called Raïssa to come and have a feast with us in Father's room.

"No, not Raïssa," her mother exclaimed. "She can't eat it: it gives her acne. It's for you and your papa."

I went to find Father, and we sat down and began to swallow the delicious stuff greedily. Father did not eat much, but gave me the job of finishing the box. Not long afterwards I began to feel such pains in my stomach that I rolled about on the bed and on the floor. I was given coffee and I vomited it up – vomited as though I was going to empty out all my inwards. I heard them say that my father was ill too. I wanted to see him, but I had not the strength to drag myself to where he was. I could no longer stand up.

"A doctor, quickly!" cried M. Golovashkin. "She must be taken to hospital at once."

A cab was fetched and I was hoisted inside. Yelena Kirillovna sat beside me and held me round the waist. At the hospital they washed out my stomach – horribly painful; I was only half conscious, and believed I was at the point of death, and I did not care a bit. I could understand what was being said near me, however.

"How sad," said a voice. "So young, and tries to commit

... and all because she was in love and her parents scolded her. . . ."

For Mme Golovashkin had had the gall to tell the doctor this fairy-tale. She took care to say nothing about the caviare she had given us, which she might well have poisoned.

After some hours, when I felt that my spirits were somewhat restored, I was taken home in an ambulance. I made my way to Father's room, where I found him in bed, yellow and motionless, looking like a corpse, but he opened his eyes, smiled at me and said:

"Better now, *rybka*; better now."

"Why don't you go to the hospital too? It would cure you. You should have your stomach washed out."

"I've had it. My doctor came. I'm better, I tell you. What about you?"

I said I wanted to lie down so as to be able to be on my feet for the midnight mass.

"Yes," he said, "that's the thing. We shall be able to go, in spite of everything, and give thanks to God. We jolly nearly kicked the bucket after that damned caviare."

"It's lucky Raïssa didn't have any," I said. "Yelena Kirillovna was quite right to stop her."

When we set out we looked like two corpses walking, suddenly shrunk – deflated, as it were – and pale yellow, like wax.

When we arrived at the college in our cab, and people noticed that we were ill, everyone hurried to offer us chairs, which is most exceptional. Father refused, and insisted on standing, as is customary; I knelt and thanked Heaven for preserving my father alive. People whispered round us, and after mass professors, mistresses, friends – they all surrounded us, kissing me and asking gently whether I felt better, for the news of our strange accident had already spread. Yelena Kirillovna was all honey and devotion. She excused herself to us for her caviare's not having been completely fresh.

In the end we all did our best to forget what had happened, as we had to, if we were to go on living there.

* * *

My departure for Moscow was being continually put off because my father was not well. (He was losing so much blood that he was forced to wear a sanitary towel, like a woman.) One day I went into the kitchen after dinner to fetch his coffee from Tanya, the cook.

Tell me, *baryshnya* (Miss): is it true you're leaving us in a few days? Are you going to leave your papa all alone?"

"He's coming with me though. Of course he'll come back here afterwards."

"Don't leave him, Miss. I tell you, I beg you not to leave your papa."

Her voice began to tremble and her eyes suddenly filled with tears.

"Come now, Tanya," I said. "What is it? Dear Tanya, what's happened to you?"

"Listen," she whispered very hastily, evidently afraid that Yelena Kirillovna would appear in the kitchen. "For months and months now the mistress has been putting a powder in his coffee. It's possibly been going on for two years. She thinks I don't see; she turns her back, but there are times when I do see, and sometimes she is in such a hurry that she spills some of the powder on the table or the floor. I don't know what it is, but a doctor could tell. Tell the *barin* that he mustn't drink any more of that cursed coffee. Perhaps she's trying to kill your father, the dear man. For a long time now he's been looking ill, and so changed . . ."

She crossed herself and handed me the cup.

"In this coffee there's nothing," she added, "because it's you who are pouring it out; but tomorrow you'll see she won't let you, the viper. . . But swear to me upon your father's head that you won't say that it's me who told you this."

"But Tanya, why haven't you told us about this before? It wasn't right to keep it to yourself. In fact it's a crime."

"My poor young lady, what would have become of me if I'd told you? She's got me—she knows all about my sad life, and when she's angry she never fails to remind me of it. 'You wretched woman,' she says. 'I'll tell your husband everything, and he'll kill you or leave you.' She frightens me, she's so wicked. . . . Aye, aye! You don't know. Quick now, hurry back!"

I took the coffee and hastened back to the dining room, the tray shaking in my hands.

"You haven't hurried yourself," Father remarked.

"The coffee was cold: Tanya had to heat it up." And I added, "Tell me, papa: is your coffee really so good that you can't do without it?"

He smiled and held out the cup to me: "You can drink as much and as often as you wish."

When he had drunk his malt he went off to his room, and I followed him.

"Come out onto the balcony, Papa I've something to tell you, but you must swear never to give away the person who told me the secret. It's very serious she's in great danger from her husband It's Tanya."

"More kitchen gossip How can you lower yourself to chatter with that woman?" he protested "And why doesn't she come and see me herself?"

"That's just it She can't, because of Yelena Kirillovna, and Tanya's own husband Poor Tanya did something wrong, and Yelena Kirillovna helped her out of it, thanks to that other woman, Sophia Davidovna – you know who I mean the midwife – and every time Yelena Kirillovna tells Tanya that if she says or does whatever it is she'll tell her husband the whole story She pays her no wages, and she even owes her money, and the wretched Tanya is convinced that her husband might kill her, or take away her son – and you know how fond of him she is But today she confessed it all to me, because she's afraid I'm going to leave you here alone "

I told him what the cook had said, word for word "And that's the reason for your bad health, Papa," I finished

I was trembling myself, and I saw him go pale

"Bring your coffee in here tomorrow," I insisted, "but don't drink it keep it and have it analysed, *papochka* Promise me you will Otherwise I shall drink some of it every day and we shall both be ill together, like last time."

I went out of doors, fearing to betray myself before the monstrous female If only I could have avenged my father! But wasn't it because of him, through his own fault, that she had taken to crime? What would he do? How would he behave to the mistress he had jilted? And wasn't he perhaps the father of her child, Raïssa, too?

At dinner next day she brought the coffee herself although I had offered to fetch it, my father calmly lit a cigarette and began to read his newspaper I swiftly seized the cup and tasted the drink

"How bitter your coffee is today, Papa," I exclaimed

He did not answer, but took his cup and went out without a word, although when he got up from table he always said "Thank you," and Yelena Kirillovna would answer. "God give you health "

"Can't you leave him alone for a moment? Let him drink his coffee in peace," cried the Fury, staring at me. "What a wretch you are!"

What a plague! Of course the coffee isn't good enough for our little princess, but who asked you to drink it? Your father can drink it all right by himself."

I wanted to make a furious reply that Father would never touch the stuff again, but I remembered my promise not to betray Tanya.

I went into Father's room: he was writing and the full cup was by his side.

"Let me empty it, Papa."

"No: don't touch it. I'm going to take the contents to a friend of mine, for him to see what's in it. But you say nothing: not a word."

From that day on he always took his coffee into his room after dinner; otherwise everything seemed normal, except that at table he was almost dumb, only exchanging a few words with Golovashkin, the children or myself. I did not dare to refer to the affair, even in private: he knew what he was doing, I supposed, and in a few days we should be far away. If only he could have stayed in Moscow too: what a joy for me that would have been.

21

THE DAY OF OUR DEPARTURE ARRIVED, AND I INSISTED ON going by train; I loved travelling by coach, but it would have been too exhausting for Father. The Golovashkin girls (but not Yelena Kirillovna: Father's complete silence to her recently showed clearly that he had discovered Tanya was speaking the truth and that there was a dose of some poison or other in his coffee. He was beginning to feel better, too) came to see us off, and I was particularly sorry for Raissa, though I hoped that when I was no longer there Father would take the girl under his protection without false modesty or embarrassment.

The nightmare was over. In the train I took my father's hand and pressed it to my cheek. I could be myself – blossom out, laugh, sing if I wanted to. I could chatter to Father and kiss him, and there was no one now to put the evil eye on me, to accuse me at every word and action of being a liar, corrupt and hypocritical.

At every station a crowd of *babas*, *muzhiks* and children, dressed in vivid colours, with flowered kerchiefs on their heads, barefoot or wearing their eternal *lapti*, made an assault on the carriages, offering all kinds of victuals: pasties, apple cakes, cheese-cakes, cream, milk, eggs, fruit, *kvass*, roast chickens, melons and water melons.

I reminded Father of how he had once left a train at a station, to fetch some food, and how I was afraid he might forget me; and so I had slipped down on to the platform to look for him. The train had started and Father had arrived just in time to catch me by the ear and to hoist me up on to the footboard.

"You were a terror sometimes: you put me through the hoop. But now, I hope, everything will go off all right. Promise me to be nice to Uncle Anton and your aunt. She is specially kind. He is rather difficult to understand, but he has a practical character and good sense. We shall stay with him for a time, until we find a boarding-house or a decent family" (like the Golovashkins, I said to myself) "and then I can go back to Tiflis with my mind at rest. Don't rely too much on your uncle and aunt; but you know I shall still exist, *rybka*, and you can always count on me. Only don't forget that when I die you'll have no one left you can be absolutely sure of."

I could not understand why not. Was it only because I was his natural daughter, or because I clung to my original religion, or had he other reasons? Perhaps my mother really was a baptized Jewess, as Yelena Kirillovna declared. Or a Tatar I perfectly remember having seen in an album belonging to my father several photographs of a very beautiful woman, very much *décolletée*, with her hair in ringlets. I used always to pore over these and ask my father who the lovely lady was.

"Why do you call her 'the lady from Amsterdam'?" I insisted.

Father smiled and always turned the page without answering. He never lifted the veil with which he had muffled my past and my identity, and I have never succeeded in uncovering them myself.

It was pride (and the taciturnity and reserve that resulted from it) that prevented us both from being entirely happy.

As we approached Moscow one morning I suddenly saw the sky glittering with thousands of cupolas of every colour, the flashes of gold being the most conspicuous. My heart beat at the thought that in this city of magnificence and legend there was already living a being dear to me. At the station there was an incredible crush of *muzhiks* with their *babas* and fair-haired children, all overburdened with bundles,

parcels and fowls in baskets, among the clamour of incarcerated sucking pigs, ducks and every sort of animal, that were being dragged about third class, the whole bathed in a smell which was a mixture of train smoke, *makhorka* (cheap Russian tobacco), and the odours of rustic health belonging to the Slavonic people, made up of onion, cloth bleached in the sun, *lapti*, wet dogs, sweat (sweat makes up a good part of the dose, a smell, to tell the truth, characteristic not only of the Russian people but of all peoples). It was not the same smell as in the Caucasus. In the stations there the smoke was mixed with the musty smell of garlic and mutton; flowers and fruits, too, had a stronger perfume. Apart from that there was the same mass of bundles, baskets, parcels, fruit and fowls. The languages were not the same, though. In the Caucasus the accent is more guttural, and the delivery extremely rapid, like that of the Italians and French. The Russians sing their words and drag out the syllables: I cannot say that I prefer one to the other: I think that at bottom I love all nations.

In the middle of this hubbub of shouts and gesticulations there stood a tall, elegant man, in whom Father recognized his brother Anton. They embraced.

"This is Manya," said Father, pushing me in front of him.

I spluttered a few words in Polish. My uncle laughed.

"Can you still talk Polish-Tatar? Good: you'll learn. Come along: my carriage is waiting outside."

* * *

If I ask myself today, sincerely, why I could not stay in Moscow and work there, the answer I think is that I was not sufficiently amenable to discipline, not meek enough, for my uncle. After being depressed, crushed, abused by the Golovashkins for thirteen years I intended to be free of despotic authority. Uncle Anton had little understanding of his own people, and less of me: I was a stranger to him. I remember the first time he introduced me to some friends of his:

"May I present to you a girl my brother has taken under his wing. He is interested in an artistic education for her. You understand? He is completely mad, poor man. Girls are good for marriage, that's all. Good for marriage and having children. Anyhow that's what I think."

When Father left Moscow my uncle tried to form me according to his own ideas, and if I resisted: "You dare to stand up to me, snotty brat? No one disputes my intelligence: haven't I built up a fortune? Aren't I a man of eminence? There is a library called after me; I'm a

patron of schools; hundreds of workmen tremble before me. What's your father, compared with me? *Durak! Bednydurak!* (Fool! poor fool!)"

And the way he spoke to his wife, a beautiful, gentle person, and to his children and servants. he did not give orders. he yelled, thumped the furniture, slammed doors and struck the workmen. The coachman who drove me about Moscow, to the academy and so on, told me that my uncle had once summoned a servant, a Tatar, I believe, up to his study, had locked the door and had flogged him so brutally that the man, seeing no way of escape, had smashed his way through the window, fallen from the first floor into the yard and shattered his skull.

The coachman himself had at first had to put up with being knocked about, kicked and called a son of a bitch or a son of a whore – he, one of the Tsar's veterans! – but one day, in the sledge, when my uncle began hitting him from behind and swearing at him because he was not driving fast enough to please him, he got out into the snow with his whip and gave my uncle a hiding. He urged the horses on in the direction of Moscow, and ran away and hid for several days, for he could not go out in his smart uniform. Eventually he decided to go back to my uncle, hand in his fur coat, and perhaps go to prison. My uncle received him in his office, with the marks of the whip still visible on his face.

"I'm back, *barin*. Here is your fur coat. you can do what you like with me. Shove me in prison, or give me back my old clothes and a little money."

"Idiot!" said my uncle. "You were as drunk as an owl. These things happen, but let it be the last time. No, I'll keep you, only about that business. keep quiet about it, eh? Now be off."

22

IT WAS IN 1911 THAT I STARTED LIVING IN MOSCOW. BEFORE he went Father took for me a big room with central heating in a big six-storey house with a lift, near the Red Gate, where some Polish friends of Uncle Anton's lived. I shall call them M. and Mme X. My

landlady had a tiny head, with the face of a doll, and a lovely soprano voice; but her body could hardly be contained and supported by two chairs. It was most odd to hear this angelic voice issuing from such a wineskin (like the ones I used to see in the Caucasus). In order to look anything like human she had to wear the most extraordinarily roomy clothes. Her husband was quite normal, and kind, I think. He used to help with her toilet before he left for his office: I never knew exactly what his business was.

The day Father left for Tiflis was a sad one for me.

"You shall come for the holidays," he promised me. "Be brave, and be good. *Don't trust women and keep away from men.* That is all I can say to you at the moment. I am leaving you to look after yourself. If you don't get on with your Uncle Anton, have no more to do with him. Above all, write to me. Don't forget: whatever happens I'm your best friend. Don't keep anything from me, *rybka.*"

I almost wept as I stood on the platform watching the train slowly disappear. I went back by tram, and Mme X. declared that my father was a delightful, charming man, and had asked her to be very good to me; that he adored me and that I was the one blessed thing in his life. What joy those words gave me; but also what anguish at the thought that I might lose him, far away from me, sick and lonely.

But I must be good and start work at the Stroganov School of Decorative Art which Uncle Anton had recommended to Papa, where I could learn several handicrafts at the same time. I decided to take painting on china and pottery; but my afternoons were still unoccupied, and I resolved to take the course at a free academy of painting, where the instructor was a well-known painter, and where I could paint from the life. At last I should find models and would devote myself to real painting.

My uncle was not pleased: I was costing my father a fearful lot, he declared. "To satisfy your caprices you'll take the last shirt off his back. Why aren't you my daughter? I'd make you toe the line!"

When I had got things organized I thought the time had come to see Kay again. I felt lonely and out of my element. The X. family, the ballads that Madame sang at the piano every evening, the slightly improper stories told by a young retired army officer who used to keep her company in the daytime and sometimes dined with us – all this was not enough for me. I could go to my uncle's whenever I wished, but I had decided to visit him as seldom as possible. Perhaps I was wrong,

but I had good reason for doing so. I thought he said too often that I was a pretty girl, and that in time I should probably be a superb woman, if I would consent to learn something of the manners of a lady of society: I felt a certain distrust of him. He had an odd way of letting his eyes dwell on my bust, my waist, and in fact my whole body. I had the sensation that he was undressing me with his eyes, which were indeed piercing and malicious. Meanwhile the letters he wrote to Father about my conduct were not particularly kind: in fact they were untrue in every point.

I took my courage in both hands and went to the part of the town Kay lived in, a poor quarter, where there lodged a large number of students. He was out, but his landlady said he would be back soon, and let me wait in his room. She brought a samovar and some white bread, and I buried myself in a big armchair. When Kay came in and saw the steaming samovar, he was greatly surprised. He came up to the table, where I had arranged some flowers in a vase, and then suddenly turned and caught sight of me.

"I had a feeling as I came up the stairs," he said, "that something a bit unusual was going on here. Then, as I came in, I smelt the flowers, and I thought that perhaps. . . ."

We were face to face at last, but we did not even kiss. A few commonplace words, hardly even affectionate. . . . We seemed to distrust each other, to be afraid of something – we did not know what: of losing our heads? Of committing the inevitable act? Of running the risk of catastrophic results?

Yet little by little our confidence returned, and our loving friendship found its normal course again. We used to go to the theatre together, and he would accompany me home, where we spent hours chattering away at the front door; but still we did not behave like real lovers who kiss each other at every opportunity. I did not wish to show Kay that I loved him very much, and perhaps he had a similar motive: yet we were very happy together. I sometimes cooked a meal and asked him to come for the evening with the friend who lived with him: but the X. family did not look favourably on these evening parties. "Student" to them meant nihilist and malefactor, and soon Madame began to rebuke me: I came in too late; I went about with unsuitable people, I would hurt my father. I told her that I was sufficiently fond of him not to do anything I should have to blush for, but she refused to believe that I was not going to bed with Kay – and with other boys. And yet it

was true: a kiss or two – how seldom – when we parted at the door, that was all we allowed each other. We were mistrustful of the impulse that might have swept us away. I knew everything and I knew nothing about love. We both realized we were in Moscow to work, and that our parents relied on our good behaviour. It was not the desire that we lacked, though: the courage? We surrounded ourselves with friends in order not to be alone together in his room or mine; time passed and we forgot the gnawing of desire.

During the winter I had chilblains on both my feet, and had to walk with crutches; at Christmas, from going from one studio to another, I had a bad attack of bronchitis; I could not breathe, and I was afraid it was pleurisy, such as I had had at Tiflis. After thirteen years of the mild Caucasian climate the cold of Moscow was murderous. I had to keep my room; Mme X. sent for a doctor, and the maid looked after me as well as she could. Neither my uncle nor my aunt came once to see me, and I realized that I must expect no more from them. I wrote to my father that the climate was much too severe for me, that I had had to give up the school of arts and crafts because I coughed without ceasing in the overheated studios and the atmosphere of dust and strong smells; I told him I should arrive in the spring, when a milder temperature allowed me to undertake the long journey.

Meanwhile I recovered and took up my work at the academy of painting again. The work of the students was very different from what I had known at Tiflis. They were disciples of Matisse, Van Dongen and Van Gogh, and I was much struck by their pictures. I went to the museums in Moscow, and the Russian paintings I found there were probably very good, but the only works I liked were those of Vrubel, who died mad, people said, like Van Gogh. There was something frightening about his painting: it was a piece of colour, and from close to one could not distinguish anything; but from further away one could see the whole rainbow of his palette arrange itself. Very few people appreciated his work or understood it, yet everybody *felt* that he was a genius. I went also to private collections, where there were already some canvases by foreign artists; but I was not yet ready to understand modern painting. I was very ignorant at bottom, and what I longed for most was to learn and work. Perhaps what I lacked at that time was a real master who would have directed me and set me on the right path.

In Moscow I made the acquaintance of the Italian primitives, those

miracles of art that everyone praised to the skies, but only knew through reproductions. Russian painting, classical and so vivid and full of colour, I liked as I would have liked a literary subject. When I looked at those landscapes of steppe, plain, hill, snow, field and forest, I saw Russia, the Holy Russia of which I already had some knowledge. The *babas* of Malyavin in their motley clothes gave me ideas for decorative *motifs* on panels and trays: you could almost hear the laughter of those bulky girls and women, they seemed so much alive. At the Tretiakov Gallery Repin seemed actually to shed human blood in his picture recalling the tragic death of the Tsarevich Ivan, and the expression of the agonized, maniac eyes of his father pursued me in my dreams. I was amazed at Shishkin, Bilubin, Zorin, Serov – famous names. But I had no desire to paint like them. I was much more attracted by the mosaics and mural paintings in the Caucasus monasteries, and I should have preferred, too, to see Italy and its marvels. I wrote again to my father to say that I was not satisfied with my work, and that my bad health made it very hard for me to go on with my studies at the school of arts and crafts, I rather advised me to wait.

23

WHEN THE SPRING CAME I THOUGHT I WOULD DO SOME painting out of doors, from nature, and I used to set off in the mornings for the forest near Moscow. The tram got me there very quickly, and once there I could battle undisturbed with my colours and brushes, for there was hardly anyone about. One day, however, when I was most busily mixing my colours – very badly – I suddenly heard a man's voice quite quietly prompting me as to what I ought to do. I turned quickly, half annoyed and half frightened, for it was no ordinary voice. I saw a man standing behind me, tall and thin, in a long cloak, bare-headed and nearly bald, his skull gleaming in the sun, the pallor of it accentuated by his beard, and very unusual eyes, which were big and black and stared at me as though to hypnotize me or to entice me to him. To put it briefly, he looked rather mad; I thought

he must obviously be an artist – certainly no bourgeois – although his clothes were very clean and betokened a good deal of care (he wore, for instance, a *lavallière*, a loosely tied cravat)

“Allow me to introduce myself, *baryshnya* Ivan Ivanovich Lishov, painter. I took it upon myself to give you some advice, seeing that you were hesitating over the mixing of your colours. Where do you come from? Where do you work?” he went on, staring at me in the same peculiar way.

My impression was that he thought I was a little goose. He was about my father’s age, and I took courage and answered him, though not fully. He laughed and said he could see only too well that I was dissatisfied, that he begged my pardon, but he had not been able to let slip such a good opportunity of making the acquaintance of a most attractive young girl who was assuredly very gifted. He was beginning to bore me to death, so, when I observed that he was not ready to go, I collected my apparatus and prepared to clear off.

“I’m vexed at having startled you,” he went on. “But come and see me tomorrow. I’ll show you how to paint a landscape. You mustn’t be nervous and timid. I’m not an artist for fun. I love everything young and beautiful, everything to do with art. I love beauty in women, and you are beautiful. Hasn’t anyone told you that yet? You can’t think how much more beautiful you might be. And you’re innocent, I can see. Coming alone to paint in the forest! Little girl, this spot is swarming with rough customers. You’re running the risk of leaving all your feathers behind – all of them, do you understand? If you have no friends in Moscow, allow me to act as your guide and to help you acquaint yourself with life. One feels so lonely in a big city, especially a young girl like you.”

I purposely said nothing to him about my uncle or about Kay, for it amused me to see how far he would go. He seemed so excited and ready to do anything to please me. He took me back to the tram and then proceeded to accompany me home, carrying my box of paints all the way. When we came to where I lived it was clear that he liked the look of it, but I was not such a fool as to ask him to come up with me. We arranged to meet in the forest.

When we saw each other again he very nearly ran to kiss me. I was his “little girl”. I said to myself: “This is the last time I shall see you alone: you’re beginning to annoy me seriously.” I told him about my father and about Tiflis, thinking, “I wonder what he will produce for

me." He talked of painting, of Italian art, of Italy, Rome, Florence, Naples and Capri. I listened, and found that I was listening with all my soul, as though he were telling me some enchanting fable. I forgot his mad eyes, his baldness. I drank in his words.

"If you like, Manya, there's nothing to prevent our going to Rome next autumn, both of us. I will be your instructor; I'll teach you painting, drawing, Italian and even German. I'll show you what art is, as it ought to be understood; I'll teach you to see it and love it. I'll make a real artist of you. You'll be wasting your time, all alone here: you'll never manage to sort yourself out. Think about it, and write to your father. When I go to Yalta, at the same time as you go to Tiflis, we shall be able to see each other again. I'll talk to your father."

I avoided seeing him too often, and did not go to the rendezvous that he was never tired of asking me for, but I sometimes found him waiting for me outside the academy, or near my house, and he insisted on seeing me home or walking with me. Eventually I told Kay all about it, and begged him to protect me from this aged Romeo, so one day, on coming out of the academy, I saw Kay on one side and on the other my old, bearded admirer, with his pallor and his burning eyes. I held out my hand to Kay, pretending that I had not seen Ivan Ivanovich. He came up, none the less, and in a hurt, serious voice declared that he realized that I was young and heedless, but that I had no right to forget my career, and that only he could help me become an artist, not one of those novices that Moscow was full of.

I introduced Kay to him, leaving out nothing of his full name, which sounded well, I added that he was a childhood friend of mine, that we had known each other in Tiflis, that my father knew him very well – not only Kay himself, but all his family.

Ivan's face clouded somewhat, but he was not disconcerted.

"Well, I am most happy to know that you have a real friend here who can protect you. I thought you were alone, alarmingly so, and that's why I offered my services, but I am vexed if I went against your wishes. So *à bientôt*, dear Maru-sya. I hope you will still let me see you again and chatter about art and painting."

He bowed respectfully, and I could not tell whether the bow was partly meant for Kay.

"He's a mad dog, a real satyr, that creature of yours," said Kay. "If he goes on chasing after you I'll knock his ribs in."

"All right, Kay," I answered. "But wait a bit. I've decided to avoid

him: perhaps he'll understand that my very politeness is a sign for him not to persist. He wants to see my father, and he's quite capable of writing to him. Clumsy fool that I am! I believe I told him what Papa's post is."

"Don't torment yourself," said Kay. "When he sees my fist under his nose he'll slope off pretty quick. . . . What's he after?"

"He wants me to go to Italy with him and work there, since I can't stand the winter here."

"What an idea! You shall stay and work here, Manya, because I'm here and you'll always find me ready to defend you. Look at these fists: they're yours. Besides, what's the point of running off so far from me and from your father too? Do you see me setting off for China?"

"Are you sure you wouldn't go, Kay, if your work and your future depended on it?"

"I still hope your father won't let you go with that lunatic."

Some days later I found Ivan Ivanovich standing at the approach to my house with a bouquet of flowers in his hand.

"I'm taking you for a walk in the country. We can have a chat: I'll tell you hundreds of things you haven't any notion of."

He talked easily and friendly: his eyes no longer looked like the eyes of a fried whiting. He had brought different guns to bear: he was acting the man of intelligence and culture, the great traveller. In the tram, which was carrying us I did not know where, he spoke of Greece, Constantinople, the Bosphorus, and the miraculous frescoes and mosaics of Byzantine art. I was impassioned by all this; I had such a thirst for knowledge and learning, such a love of books. And here was a book talking to me, graphically, indefatigably. Like the painter he was, he gave colour and poetry to everything he said. He was delighted to see how interested and attentive I was.

"You see, then, if we went together, what a good thing it would be for me and how exciting for you. I should be an intelligent guide who would teach you the two aspects of things, the spiritual and the material. In two or three years you would be a true artist."

I could not have conversations like this with Kay, of course. I loved him, but art seemed to me to be above everything else. I did not deny the love, the happiness, the courage, the joy in living that Kay might give me; but I was horribly frightened that it might all turn to ugliness and tragedy from the moment when we became real lovers. Perhaps Kay felt the same.

THE TIME CAME TO RETURN TO TIFLIS. WHEN I ARRIVED I looked in the crowd for my father. Nobody. My heart sank. There was a gentleman near me, standing with his back to me, elegantly dressed in a light-grey suit, obviously also looking for someone. He turned round, and there we were, face to face, lost in amazement. Parted for six months, and we had not recognized each other.

"Really! It's a bit too much!"

We fell into each other's arms, each trying to see what changes there were in the other.

"You're better, Papa. You look handsomer. In that suit you're like a young bridegroom. . . ."

"And you've got taller – thinner too; but it suits you. Your chilblains don't hurt any more?"

In the cab I asked for news about everybody, but Father was laconic: "Everything's going well: you'll see. By the way, I've had two letters from a madman who says he loves you and wants to marry you. I shall really have to think about going to see him at Yalta."

I answered that I was not in the least in love with this absurd man, but that he had invited me to go to Italy with him, and that, if Father saw no objection to it, it would give me the greatest joy.

"Indeed, the Italian climate might suit you better. We'll talk about it at home, *rybka*. . . . My brother is not at all pleased with you. His letters say you're obstinate and ill bred. . . . I could see you both from here, each as impossible as the other."

I told Papa what I had learned in Moscow about my uncle – his irascibility, his despotism, his narrow-mindedness, and his contempt for his brother because of the disgrace that I was.

"I wanted to get on: I did try, do believe me. But that frightful cold: I was paralysed most of the time. Chilblains on my feet and my hands, and I coughed and coughed. I couldn't walk or breathe; but I dragged myself to the school every day on crutches and in shoes that I'd slit because my toes hurt so. I didn't want to use Uncle Anton's carriage: he was too harsh and unjust, to me and about you. And when I had to keep my room no one took the trouble to come and see me. I realize only too clearly now, Papa: don't ever talk to me about your brother again: he has no affection for me."

Father did not answer.

Grandmother Golovashkin came out to light us with a paraffin lamp, and everyone ran to greet me and kiss me. Raissa had grown, but

looked peaky and timid; Zhenya seemed more entranced and loquacious than ever, and Yuliya quieter and more shut in. I looked for Yelena Kirillovna, but could not see her. Father kissed me, promised to come back soon, and went out; and when he had gone Yelena Kirillovna came out of a dark room, and I could see what six months had done to her: she was thin and yellow, carelessly dressed, hair unkempt, her features drawn and sagging at the same time. She came to shake my hand, but I felt that out of mere charity I should kiss her. The skin of her face was dry and flaccid. The Fury was more than tamed: she was broken. I even felt sorry for her.

From what Zhenya told me later the change had occurred after my departure. There had been a great scene when Father refused to go on taking his meals with them; everyone begged him to go on as before: the others did not know the reason for this outburst, but their mother must surely have known, even if she said nothing. Since then she had eaten hardly anything and had lived on bread and tea. She had found work at a milliner's in order, she said, not to live at her husband's expense. In fact, she had practically admitted her guilt.

Father no longer said a word to Yelena Kirillovna. When he needed something he would approach the grandmother or one of the girls; or Raissa would take a message to her mother. How could he go on living here? Because of little Raissa? Because he had got used to the apartment, to the balcony with its remarkable view of the metallic serpent of the Kura River and the surrounding mountains? Or did he enjoy savouring his revenge and showing every day that his health was better? The fact was that he had partially recovered and that he no longer lay in bed at home, but went out a lot, elegantly dressed, unrecognizable. Had I not failed to recognize him at the station?

Everything showed that Yelena Kirillovna understood that Father knew all about her criminal machinations; she was terrified of him and of the possible scandal: hence the change in her, her collapse, her despair.

Yelena Kirillovna let rooms – to men, of course – in the hope of catching husbands for her daughters. One of her lodgers was a Jewish musician, the conductor at the National Opera House. He was not looking for a wife, but he did his utmost to corrupt Sonya, after he failed with the other two girls. I can see him now, glossy, well-to-do and an excellent musician; he was the life and soul of the parties after the theatre. One day Sonya whispered to me that she had a rendezvous

with him "somewhere" – at a hotel, for sure, or at an obliging friend's who lent his room on these occasions. She was very red and over-excited, and asked whether I would not go with her: apparently her conductor thought he fancied me.

"To do what?" I asked (hypocritically, I admit).

"Oh," she answered, "he's very skilful. Let me whisper. . . ."

She thrust her tongue into my ear, which tickled me, and then, still with her tongue, she stroked my lips.

I ran away laughing, but excited in spite of myself. From then on I knew what to think about the conductor, and I trembled for Sonya for fear it might all be found out. Golovashkin might be a pervert, and his wife might commit adultery in the sight of her family and the whole town but none the less they wanted their children to grow up with haloes of purity and chastity.

The conductor went away, eventually – most fortunately, for I am sure he had recently succeeded in his purpose with the three girls which produced some comic squalls at home.

Soon after this Sonya succeeded in marrying a brilliant young officer, a prince of the bluest-blooded Georgian aristocracy. Their union began badly: by the end of her month she still had not allowed her husband to make love to her – why not? I often heard her whispering about it to her sisters, who encouraged her. Perhaps she was no longer a virgin and was afraid her husband would find it out. She often came to our house in tears and complained that her husband was jealous and beat her, kicked her and dragged her about by the hair. All round me I heard the voices of women and girls lamenting their bitter disillusionment. What did they gain by marrying? Their husband's name: that was all. They might become Princess So-and-So, and get their behinds kicked; or the wife of an officer, and have to run to their parents and borrow a score or so of roubles because the poor man gambled at the casino, and lost, of course. There were others who had made a more modest marriage, with a student, and had been happy to start with, in spite of the sickness and pain of confinements; but after two or three years the happy face had grown pale, plagued with jealousy and insomnia, and the husband was being unfaithful with another girl student, younger, fresher. I wondered whether it was all worth while, whether I could put up with such disillusionment, could stand being beaten and deceived; and I determined to remain single and free, rather than be at the mercy of a husband and his

family. When I thought of Kay and the possibility of our living together, I decided I would prefer to be free to pack my bag when I pleased and be off by myself.

On the first night that I was back in Tiflis Yelena Kirillovna came to my bedside, as I lay reading and unable to sleep, knelt down and besought me, with tears that were certainly genuine, to ask Father to forgive her, for my sake and Raïssa's. I said that for my part I forgave her willingly, but I could not answer for my father; perhaps the very fact that he continued to live there showed that he had in fact forgiven her, even if he had changed.

She looked up and said it was I who had caused him anxiety with my bad behaviour in Moscow, giving way to my pride and extravagant humours. Her tears were not yet dry, but she was regarding me differently and with hatred. What was the good of opening old wounds? I took up my book and controlled myself. She was really unhappy, but what could she expect from Papa? His thanks for years of slow poisoning? I admired his courage in staying with this unbalanced family, one of whom was quite mad. Who knew that she would not start her sorceries again next day?

"Listen, Yelena Kirillovna," I said. "My father is old enough to be judge of his own actions. Anyhow, I don't know what you're asking him to forgive you for: I thought it was for all the harm you've done me, and I've told you that for my part I forgive you, even though, on top of everything else, you tried to alienate me from my father; but if you've harmed him, ask him to forgive you. Now leave me: I came to see my father, since he could not come to Moscow. You shan't see much of me, I promise you. Goodnight. I'll talk to my father, although it makes me feel sick to think of it."

She went at last, shouting that I was driving my father into his grave.

I remember hearing that she had more than once tried to commit suicide before we came there, and that once it was her husband who had taken her down when she had hanged herself.

Babushka told me: "She's a cunning one. She always managed to try to kill herself when there were people nearby; but with her nature she's quite capable of killing someone else or of forcing him to kill himself in despair." When I think nowadays of my father's tragic death, I wonder whether she did not do all she could to drive him to this desperate act.

FATHER SHOWED ME TWO LETTERS FROM IVAN IVANOVICH, overflowing with enthusiasm about me; but he also said what Uncle Anton said, that in Moscow I was running the risk of falling into bad company, coming under bad influences and letting myself be enticed into political foolishness, which would be a pity for a girl so charming, fresh and gifted. Of course he had not liked Kay, and was jealous of him; and Kay, whom I had already met in Tiflis, besought me gently not to go so far away from my father and from Moscow. I was in raptures at being begged like this, but secretly I was determined to go if Father thought Ivan Ivanovich worthy of his trust.

So Father set off for Yalta one day, to see in the flesh this man who said he could make me happy. When he came back he told me what had happened when they met.

"His very beard inspired confidence," he said. "He promises he'll do everything that's necessary to make a real artist of you, and in a very short time too."

Did he count on my marrying this man, who claimed to be an artist, quite soon? Did he want me out of the house at any cost? Or did he honestly think that I should become someone in such a short time, and begin to earn my living?

I was to leave in September for Moscow, where Ivan Ivanovich would be expecting me, with some of his girl pupils. This set my mind at rest, for to be with other girls on the journey, and pursue my studies together with them, would be working in earnest, would be pleasant, and would be a good way of escaping from my supposed *fiancé*.

"If he's sincere," Father said, "if he makes you work, if he shows a regard for you and looks after you properly, you can stay, At the least thing you dislike you've only to write to me, and I'll take action, never fear. Above all be frank with me. . . . But Italy will do you good."

There were still two months of my holidays, and Father and I went out several times into the country round Tiflis. Everyone was interested in my coming journey, but I refused to see my old fellow students: all that was over; I had a new name now and did not want to turn back the pages.

Alas, time passed quickly and one day Father said that my passport was ready and that I ought to leave for Moscow where Ivan Ivanovich and his pupils would be waiting for me.

Father's work prevented his coming with me this time, and at the station we bade each other a sad farewell. He repeated that I must not

fail to tell him everything that happened to me, in order that he might guide and protect me despite the distance between us.

"Write, Manya, whatever happens. You will never be alone, for I shall always be with you, *rybka*. Be on your guard, and distrust men as well as women. Work, and never forget that I am your best friend."

"And you, Papa, look after yourself, and don't you be too trustful, either. And the moment you can come we'll try to meet somewhere, as soon as we possibly can."

For a long time I watched his elegant, white outline, standing alone on the platform, and I wept. That was the last sight I was to have of him.

26

WHEN I GOT OUT OF THE TRAIN AT MOSCOW I FOUND NO SIGN of Ivan Ivanovich at the station. I was surprised but delighted. The only thing that had slightly spoilt my journey had been the thought of soon finding myself face to face with "the man in the mask", as I called him; for my impression was that he wore a mask over his face to conceal his real expression and feelings.

When I had taken a room in a hotel that was not too dear I went straight to enquire for Ivan Ivanovich at the address he had given me in his letters. His landlord said he had not come in, so I left my address and went gaily off to find Kay. I found him at the gymnasium, practising with a group of handsome athletes. When it was over I called his name, and he was much surprised – pleasantly, I like to think.

We went back to my hotel, where I was warned downstairs that visitors could not stay after midnight: that was the rule. Kay came up, and we were both in very high spirits: being with one of the finest and dearest sons of Tiflis did something to dispel my homesickness. We chattered for a long time, and flirted a bit too – innocently but with a good deal of coquetry on my side.

"It's frightening, Manya: it's dangerous to be with you. You've been turned into a regular enchantress!"

In the days that followed we saw each other regularly, taking advantage of our dwindling freedom. We walked about mournfully, thinking of my departure. I had already begun to shiver in my between-seasons clothes. Papa had advised me to buy everything I was short of when I got to Rome, for we did not know what I should need in that foreign climate.

One fine morning Ivan Ivanovich thumped at my door unannounced. He apologized for his lateness, which was due to his pupils, he said. He was only bringing one: as for the others, their families had not had the courage to part with them – it was so far away. He gave me his address, promised to introduce the girl in question on the next day, and said we should be leaving in a few days. I pointed out that I had been in Moscow for a fortnight already, and that I was beginning to feel the cold. I thought he looked very nervous, hurried and different from before; I was delighted that he did not talk of love, and I felt calmer.

Next day I went to his hotel and met his pupil, a girl three or four years older than I, small, with big, brown plaits and a face that reminded one of a Japanese or a Kalmyk, neither pretty nor ugly, but charming and very sweet; she had long, narrow eyes which looked intelligent. I was the taller by a head and sturdier.

Ivan Ivanovich had recovered his gaiety and excitement, but Sonya – that was his pupil's name – said little and seemed rather melancholy.

I asked Ivan Ivanovich whether my father had given him any money for me, for I wanted to buy some things and I had not enough. He answered that I need buy nothing: we were leaving in three days and I could easily be patient till we reached Rome.

In those last days, in order not to suffer from the cold, I spent most of the time at my hotel, where Kay came to see me when work at the university was over for the day. On the eve of my departure we were rather mad. Our parting and the uncertainty of seeing each other again soon cast us into each other's arms; but we stopped at burning kisses and passionate embraces. Kay kept a strict watch on himself. He was trembling like a leaf, but he bit his lips till they bled. He devoured me with his gaze and with his lips, no more than that. Perhaps, if my stay in Moscow had been prolonged by a couple of weeks, we should have become frenzied lovers. . . . When I think today of my first love, my heart is full of regret. I have never forgotten it.

He saw me off at the station with a splendid bouquet of roses. We

kissed for the last time, behind a pile of huge packing cases, while Ivan Ivanovich shouted thunderously for me to hurry: he had seen Kay and was not pleased.

Then it was over. I rejoined the professor and his pupil. The train whistled, started puffing and slowly began to move. Goodbye, Moscow! It was evening, and I sat down by Ivan Ivanovich: at once I began shivering and trembling all over; I could not get warm. He grumbly unpacked from our luggage a big plaid, my father's last present to me, and wrapped me in it. From Moscow to Berlin my discomfort increased: my fingers were permanently crooked and stiff, so that I had the greatest difficulty in holding a comb, undoing my skirt or unlacing my shoes. Two days out of Moscow I had a sharp attack of rheumatism and all my warm clothes were in our luggage which was in the van; so there I was, a complete invalid with these two strangers who did not know what to do with me.

At Berlin I was taken out of the train by two porters, still wrapped in my plaid, put in a chair, and carried to a hotel near the station. A doctor, reluctantly sent for by Ivan Ivanovich, said that I could not travel in such a condition, and that I must stay in bed with my hands, arms and legs covered with ointment and dressings. What fun! I spent three days alone in my room in bed, for my companions took advantage of our misfortune to explore Berlin. I ought to have had a nurse, but I knew that Ivan Ivanovich would refuse to "waste" the money.

At the end of three days I was again carried in a chair to the train for Rome, where I should be able to be looked after properly. It seemed a bad start, and Ivan Ivanovich did not bother to conceal his bad humour.

At Rome, I thought, we should at least put up at a good hotel, it would be comfortable, I should be able to look after myself, sunbathe and have a bath. . . .

Oh, yes! With his eye on our expenses Ivan Ivanovich got permission from the authorities for us to go to a lodging house for emigrants from Russia. This was a former prison, later to become a convent, but then a refuge for Russians travelling in Italy. It was an immense, grey building with a huge dining room, and separate dormitories for men and women, all these half below ground level; at the back were a kitchen, where families could cook their meals, and shower baths. The ceilings were vaulted and the walls were damp; from my bed I

could watch lizards running up the walls. The windows were tiny and very high in the walls, and blocked by bars. It was a prison, indeed!

Sonya's bed was next to mine, and just as hard and narrow. Ivan Ivanovich had had leave to sleep in the women's dormitory because I was ill. He slept nextdoor – though there was no door: only a vaulted passage between the two rooms.

I spent some days in bed, bandaged up and hardly able to do anything for myself. I could not see well enough to read. Sonya was busy cooking, and our professor scoured Rome, looking for rooms, he said. I listened to the noises from the street, and tried to guess what was going on; I told myself stories; sometimes I heard singing, a barrel-organ, the shrill voice of a woman calling a child, or men playing their favourite game, *Due-tre-quattro!* In the evening Ivan Ivanovich went to bed, read a book or had long talks with Sonya. I was rather surprised at how intimate they were. When he thought I was asleep he would call Sonya in a low voice. Quite often I had to wake her up and tell her the professor must need a glass of water or something. She would get up at once and go into his room, where I heard them whispering; sometimes I went to sleep again before she came back to bed, and sometimes I called her myself, to help me out of bed, when I had to get out; but she did not answer, and I had to manage by myself.

After three or four weeks I began to get better, and could drag myself on two sticks as far as the kitchen and the shower baths. I was longing for the day when I could sit in a *chaise-longue* in the courtyard, where there were a few palm trees and some sunlight. Ivan Ivanovich would not let me write to Father to say I had been ill, for fear of causing him anxiety; but one day he told me to write and ask him to send us some money: "Your illness has been more expensive than had been foreseen."

When I was at last allowed to spend some hours each day in the courtyard the sun not only did my poor legs good, but restored to me some of the joy of being alive. It was a great joy when I could take off the bandages and have a shower bath: I hoped that the Roman fleas, which came in through the windows by thousands to visit us, would find that *eau-de-cologne* soap was not to their taste and would leave me alone. I used to catch them on my face, my neck, all over my body, particularly in the hair. In the evening and at night I heard Ivan Ivanovich cursing in his bed. I once asked him why he called his pupil

in the middle of the night: he gave a coarse laugh and said that Sonya helped him to catch the fleas.

"In the dark?" I asked gravely.

He laughed again, while Sonya blushed.

When I was better I was often present at his conversations with his pupil. Sometimes they were interesting, but more often there were only jokes, dirty stories and dubious anecdotes which, to my shame, I did not quite understand. He made fun of my innocence, and did not believe it was sincere.

I gradually began to loathe and despise him because of Sonya. I was sometimes woken at night by a slight noise: it was Sonya crying under the bedclothes – the goose! the fool! I was beginning to see Ivan Ivanovich's game and to disentangle myself from the meshes that I had walked into with my eyes shut and with my father's approval into the bargain.

One day Sonya confessed to me that she was his mistress and, what was more, that she was three months gone with child. I had noticed that she had got thicker, but I had put it down to the Italian cooking, which I had thought was certainly doing her good!

The poor girl had no money; her family knew nothing of how she lived, and there were the beginnings of a fine tragedy. They were *petits bourgeois* and she was their only child. They lived at Yalta; she had met Ivan Ivanovich at Moscow, where she was finishing a course in architecture, and they had left for the Caucasus together. He had told her, as he had told me, that he was Professor of Painting at Petrograd University, and neither of us had ever thought to verify his statement.

Ivan Ivanovich had met Sonya's parents and grandparents at Yalta, but they had refused to allow the girl to go to Rome, where he had suggested taking her to study Italian architecture on the spot. Since she was already compromised up to the eyes with her bearded seducer, the only solution left to her was to follow him docilely. Perhaps the creature hoped that later on her parents would come round; but in the meantime money was needed to pay for Sonya's journey, for she had with her only a few clothes. She had already been six weeks pregnant when she ran away with him. It was at just this time that Ivan Ivanovich had met me in Moscow and had at once suggested taking me to Italy, where he wanted to get Sonya and her pregnancy into hiding. I quite believe that he already had a lawful wife somewhere or other.

Anyhow my father was regularly sending us a monthly allowance in roubles, which Ivan Ivanovich exchanged profitably into Italian money and we were all three living on that.

Sonya was fundamentally decent, I am sure, and revolted by the whole situation; but it was not long before she became jealous and detested me. The more misshapen her pregnancy made her the more contempt and distaste Ivan Ivanovich evinced for her. On the other hand, he complimented me on my good looks, praised my eyes and my figure, and missed no opportunity of letting Sonya feel how ugly she was growing in comparison with me. The poor girl did not answer but often wept. It was I who fought her battles with the fellow, and he called me "Marusya the plague".

On the day we moved into a *bourgeois* house with proper furniture I could not conceal my joy; at last I would be able to avoid the presence of Ivan Ivanovich, lock my door and be myself! Sonya shared my room at night, but by day she was continually in her friend's.

In spite of the great generosity of Father who sent more than was necessary for our board and lodging, Ivan Ivanovich kept declaring that life was fearfully dear and that he must find some work. He wanted Sonya to take over the cooking: I went out with him, and he helped me to walk carefully, taking me by the arm or even the waist; we walked like this, without hurrying, to visit all the Roman monuments. He said that when I was quite well we should go to St Peter's together and to the museums; meanwhile we went to the Colosseum, the Forum and the Pincio. I examined the Italian streets, the people and the old fountains in which the water sang by day and night. The brown flower-sellers would stick a flower into your bodice as a present. They were always accompanied by a little boy or girl, barefooted and looking like angels, singing all the time, as chirpy as sparrows. Carriages and carts with their great wheels passed, drawn by a horse or white oxen, driven by men with a huge whip, young and handsome or old and ugly, but always with a flower behind one ear or in the mouth. And everyone sang, sang of love and the beauty of Italy and of the Italian sun. I felt myself getting better every day, and wanted to see and understand everything. I hoped soon to take a course at an Italian painting academy and to learn Italian.

As soon as my fingers were flexible and firm enough to hold a pencil again, I began making sketches, and insisted that Ivan Ivanovich should buy me brushes and canvases; but he wanted me to stay at

home to paint, and gave me picture postcards to copy. I began to think seriously that he was laughing at me, and I told him straight out that in order to do this kind of thing I might as well have stayed at home with my father, and I begged that he would hunt up an academy where I should find models and a serious working atmosphere. By insisting, sulking and scolding I eventually got him to take my best drawings to an academy, and I was accepted.

Ivan Ivanovich now began to behave very oddly with me: he sometimes asked me to kiss him in front of Sonya; he would go to bed after dinner, shut his eyes and say:

"Come and kiss me, Marusya – quickly!"

I would look at Sonya and make a sign to show that I was not going, but she displayed a fearful face and pushed me towards the bed. Once or twice I kissed the man on the forehead or the cheek, where there was least beard (how I loathed that beard!); but it was my mouth he was after. In our room Sonya said that I must not be too obstinate or disagreeable to him, because he would immediately take it out of her: he did not want her in his bed any more, rejected her timid kisses and blamed her for her tears. I answered that I had no desire to pinch her lover, and that not only did I not love him, but I did not even respect him any more. Poor girl! it pleased her and hurt her to hear words like this; she was convinced that I too was a conquest of his. One day I suggested that I should tell the whole story in a letter to my father; I told her she could come with me – run away, rather – when my father sent me the necessary money, as I had no doubt he would.

Until now, as I have said, it had been Ivan Ivanovich who received this money, and used it as he pleased; if only he had had nothing more than the money and his job! but the man had obviously conceived the idea of disconcerting me, hoping, of course, that it would then be easier to take advantage of me. He would come into my room when I was resting, or had already gone to bed, while Sonya stayed in the other room. He came up to the bed and in the half darkness made hypnotic passes over my body; perhaps he trusted earlier experiments which had produced concrete results. I laughed covertly and wondered what he would do if I suddenly spat on his bald head. Then he would sit on the bed and, without a word, quietly touch my feet, calves, thighs, hips and on up to my breasts. At those moments I would vigorously push away his trembling hands; but he continued his treatment with a laudable persistence. On other occasions he would squeeze me against

him and make me get out of bed, then press me to his body until I could hear his heart beating and feel him shivering. I was studying him, and perhaps he was doing the same from his side.

Anyhow these goings-on started to get on my nerves and to give me goose-flesh. I began to try to find pretexts for coming in late and for not having to kiss him goodnight. I prowled about the banks of the Tiber and round the Forum, or walked up to the Pincio, hungry and without a *centime* in my pocket, just in order not to go home and be pre-ent at the brutal treatment with which he crushed Sonya, and to avoid the reproofs and sermons he aimed at me. I now made the acquaintance of Olga Mikhaylovna, a Russian lady who was an excellent musician, and extremely likeable besides. I used to visit her and listen to her playing the piano or talking, and this was how I learnt that she had a villa in Capri to which she went from time to time to see the Gorki family. I told her about my disillusionment with Ivan Ivanovich and asked her advice: ought I to inform my father about the creature's behaviour to me? Yes, she said: I was in a situation not only false but dangerous. God knew what perils I was courting in the company of such a satyr. Perhaps it was his usual policy to get with child the girls who were innocently entrusted to him, by people like my father, just as he also confiscated the money, which prevented my buying anything.

Nevertheless I did not want to have useless rows in front of Sonya, for I was sorry for the girl, her submission, her humiliation. I decided to be patient for another month, which would make five that I had lived with the pair. I had gradually regained some of my lost freedom: I went out alone, and I could talk a little Italian. Moreover my money (Father's) was most useful to Sonya. In her advanced state of pregnancy her life would have been frightful if I had abandoned her.

One day, however, Ivan Ivanovich came home in a pretty good humour, and announced that he had found some work: nothing much, of course, to start with; his bass voice had been appreciated at the Russian church and he had been taken on as a cantor. At once I said to myself that perhaps the time had come when he and Sonya might straighten things out and recover some of their happiness; so I wrote to my father to ask him how he advised me to behave to Ivan Ivanovich, and I also asked him to send the money direct to me, in order that I might be able to live as I liked. Father answered by telegram

that I was to leave "that swindler's house" at once and either to come back to Tiflis or to "ask the Russian consul to protect me". The money arrived, by wire, too, addressed to me.

I showed these two messages to Ivan Ivanovich, who flew into a black rage. He would not give me back my passport, which I needed to get the money, and started yelling I have never heard a man make such a noise

"Viper!" he shouted. "Viper that I have warmed in my bosom! I gave you all my confidence I allowed Sonya to become your friend. I wanted to make you a great lady, an artist But you'll never be anything but a little brainless hen Poor little fool! What story can you have fabricated to tell your father, such a splendid man?"

"Made up? I simply told Papa about you kissing me in the dark behind Sonya's back, and I asked him whether you ought to do that, when to Sonya you only professed for me a love that was pure and half true!"

He was mad with rage, and I thought he would hurl himself at me and hit me

"Hypocrite! Viper! As if you've never lain with your *goloshtannik* (ragged trousered) Prince Kay; but you have to defile me in the mind of your father I shall write to him too!"

"Give me back my passport, and then you can do anything you like; but I must get my money and go And don't forget that my father says that if you threaten me or are nasty to me I have only to go to the consulate they know by now what to think about you."

Perhaps this was not true yet, but I threw it on the table in the hope of frightening him In effect he threw my passport on the table, speechless with fury, his eyes at once murderous and full of tears

Was he acting? Did he really love me a little, with the selfishness of a man who wants everything for himself and nothing for anyone else? I do not know, but he did at all events take the trouble to go to fetch a cab for me and help the Italian driver to take out my luggage.

Yet when I wanted to say goodbye to Sonya he barred my way to the door; so I shouted through the keyhole 'Be brave, Sonya! I'll write to you If you are too unhappy let me know I shall come and fetch you, or you can come and join me yourself'

Ivan Ivanovich turned pale and tried to take me by the shoulders and push me downstairs.

life in two worlds 1

"Damn you! damn you!" he yelled. "Get out of here before I forget you're a child and a woman!"

I made off, fearing this madman would start hitting me.

This was the end of my adventure with the man with the black beard

two ROME
CAPRI
PARIS
BRITTANY
BIARRITZ
17F

I

SO THERE I WAS, ALONE IN ROME, AND WITH A GREAT WEIGHT off my shoulders. My friends found me a little room belonging to two Italian sisters, middle-aged widows, who were very nice people. At last I could lead an ordered life.

Among my women friends there was the Russian lady, who suggested I should spend the holidays at Capri, and promised to introduce me to the Gorki family. I should meet interesting people there, she said: the best Russian painters came from Russia itself to see Gorki; and he was surrounded by them and by Russian and foreign writers. She added that I might start as soon as I had made up my mind; she would let me have her little house, for she must go back to Paris in a few weeks.

I joyfully accepted her offer, and wrote to Father that I was soon leaving Rome to go to Capri, where I was promised a life which was pleasanter and more suitable for working.

When I said goodbye to my nice Roman landladies I made them a present of an icon, a souvenir of Yelena Kirillovna, a big pillow which would have been a nuisance on the journey, and some good drawings. They kissed me and wept, and gave me a basket of food and a little bitch – a beauty of a dog, but what an encumbrance!

As soon as I was in the train I felt very happy to be leaving Rome, although I was extremely fond of it. During my last days there I had walked about the city by myself. I had even visited the Colosseum by moonlight, nameless among the nameless tourists; I had been to the baths of Caracalla and other remains of ancient Rome. Sometimes I set off on foot, with my sketchbook, and gaily and happily walked for miles to see a ruin.

Sometimes I would go towards nightfall to the Protti quarter, a part of the city where there was a pond overgrown with reeds and overpopulated by frogs which croaked all night. I would spend hours on end there, motionless as a dead corpse, my hair uncured by the caress of the moist air – until the time came when I was obliged to leave the places that so enchanted me. As I came back I passed by the silence of sleeping barracks, and found myself in the streets of Rome again. Since that time the quarter has been drained in order to construct modern buildings in it.

One evening, as I was crossing a bridge, I stopped and put my elbows on the parapet to contemplate the black waters of the Tiber, whence a new moon was dully reflected. I thought of the many cen-

turies that had elapsed, the changes that had taken place in the appearance of Rome, the Roman people; I thought of my Kura at Tiflis and of Kay – I was missing them both so badly at Rome, where I was so much alone, though happy none the less since I had regained my freedom. . . . As soon as I began to understand what freedom was, I saw myself fighting for it; and I thought also of the struggles of the Christian peoples and the Jews, striving for centuries towards this blessed freedom. . . .

2

I SET OFF FROM ROME FOR NAPLES, WHERE I ARRIVED ON THE stroke of six o'clock in the evening. My landladies had written the name and address of a hotel for me on a scrap of paper. One had to be very cautious at Naples, for the town was swarming with rogues. With the night coming on I was afraid to take a cab: indeed I had been warned against it. So there I was, with my suitcase and a basket with the dog in it, standing in the street, quite at a loss and not knowing where to go. Eventually a gentleman, no longer young, came up and asked whether I was looking for something; upon which I showed him the bit of paper with the address on it. He said it was not far away and that it would give him great pleasure to accompany me. He picked up my suitcase and took me to the hotel, chattering all the time.

He said he would wait downstairs in case I needed anything or would like to go for a walk. He told me there was a boat for Capri next morning, and advised me to show my papers and take a fairly big room. I followed his advice, and let the dog out of the basket – she made water all over the place with great joy – and then I looked out of the window: in the dusk of this summer evening, in this Naples street, there awaited me the opportunity for a first adventure. . . . I drew the curtain, wrote a letter to my father, and went to bed like a good girl.

Next morning I had to go to the station to get my big wicker trunk. Early as it was, Naples was gay and full of noise; crowds of people of all kinds were already hurrying about. There was a smell of garlic

fried in oil, which reminded me of Lodz and Tiflis, of fish, and of the oranges which men and women were carrying in full baskets balanced on their heads: I bought some on the boat which took me to Capri.

I was in raptures at the thought of making the acquaintance of the Russian colony, the most important of whom was Maxim A. Gorki.¹ I knew of him already as a writer, and I liked his style and the essential subject of his works: the life of the Russian people. Among Russian writers I was also very fond of Tolstoy - and Gorki had been an intimate friend of his; and I liked Turgenev, who had a way of writing that was all his own (the French say that in his style he comes nearest of all Russian writers to French literature). . . . The poetry, the depth and the colour of his Russian landscapes, and his descriptions of the beauty of Russian women and girls! I liked the sadness and torments of Dostoyevsky, and the way in which he could make manifest the angel in the demon. The whole of our literature shows that Russian man is a mixture of the most terrifying bestiality with flashes of angelic purity.

I knew that since the death of Tolstoy other good Russian writers had formed a group round Gorki: Andreyev, Bunin, Merezhkovsky (whom I knew personally) and the poets Alexander Blok and Balmont; so I was very much excited and longed to know what kind of atmosphere I should find myself in at Capri and what adventures awaited me there.

The boat drew near the island, long, all yellow with flowering broom and still partly veiled by the morning mist. It seemed a magic island, rising from the blue sea and embraced by a thousand and one legends. I was met and intoxicated by scented puffs of wind. A shiver ran over me at the prospect of what this surrealist mystery, Capri, might have in store for me, with its ruins, its legends and the people of the Russian colony.

These last had come to welcome me: Gorki, his wife and their son, and my Russian friend from Rome.

"We've been expecting you, Marusya," she said. "Come and see what a reception has been prepared for you! The whole colony knows you already. You are welcome, and I hope you'll be happier here than you were in Rome, poor little girl."

She introduced me to Maxim Gorki and Marya Fedorovna, with

¹ His real name was Alexey Maximovich Peshkov (*Tr.*).

whom he was living, a celebrated Moscow beauty and one of the most gifted actresses of the Moscow Arts Theatre. She had formerly been the wife of Andreyev, the writer. Her crippled son, three or four years older than I, took charge of my luggage.

I looked at the crowd in the square: Italians, Russians and some English and Germans with beards and very long hair. We left the Gorki family, and the Russian lady and I bore off my luggage in a cab to the Piccola Marina, where I was to stay. The road ran down towards the sea, which glistened like a magic mirror. My only regret was that my father was not beside me. There came a point where the cab had to stop, since it could not get any further. Some fishermen were walking towards us up a little path, and they helped us take our luggage down to the little house right at the edge of the sea. It was white, with two floors; on the ground floor, next the sea, lived a fisherman's family; above, where my friend Olga Mikhaylovna lived, there were two rooms, a kitchen, a lavatory and a balcony.

"Here you are," she said. "I shall be spending only one night with you; then I shall go up to Gorki's and stay there a few days, and after that *au revoir*: I'm off. But before that I shall have introduced you to everybody. You won't have any more trouble managing by yourself; besides, I'm sure everyone'll love you: it will be for you to choose your friends."

She helped me to settle in: I was overflowing with joy and gratitude. That night, as I lay in bed and could hear, in the pitch darkness, nothing but the slapping of the sea just below the little house, I thought I was well recompensed for all the afflictions I had suffered, and I could easily have believed that I was being carried away in a boat to some land of dreams.

Olga Mikhaylovna took me next day to afternoon tea at the Gorkis'. There was a crowd of people and I was scared. The guests were chiefly emigrants from Russia, many of them Jews. They had all played a part in the revolutionary movement, and were waiting, either in Paris or Capri, for an amnesty which would allow them to go back to their country. The Gorkis' house was the rallying place for these people: everyone came there, great and small; it was a regular international centre of the cultured, artistic and revolutionary vanguard. There were many Russian painters who had landed from Russia, writers, actors and actresses from Moscow and Petrograd theatres and from all the great European cities. I remember seeing at Gorki's writers, men and

women, from Scandinavia, Finland, Poland, Spain, America and India. They all ate at his house and often slept there.

Marya Fëdorovna made friends with me. She worked amazingly hard, ran the house, saw that the visitors had food and a bed, checked the accounts, supervised the servants and the cooking, and in addition acted as Gorki's secretary. She knew several languages and translated her husband's articles for foreign newspapers, and looked after his vast correspondence. I believe that without her he would have been lost; moreover, at this time, when I met him, he was not well. He worked hard and very late; the crowd of visitors who gathered from near and far kept him in a continual state of overexcitement. People brought him news from Russia and Russian papers, and he read the articles devoted to him in the press of the world: there were admiring ones, but unfavourable ones too.

"They're all the same," he often grumbled. "They come here and I put them up, feed them and recommend them to people: I help them in every possible way. . . . Then they attack me and tell how I'm bloated and living like my great *bourgeois*. Puppies!"

3

MARYA FEDOROVNA SOMETIMES TOLD ME, WITH TEARS IN her voice, that she was very anxious about Gorki's health, but that she was the only person who worried about it: as for the others – all his friends tired him out by dragging him to the café and making him drink immoderately, which the great writer was absolutely forbidden to do. I had often been present at these friendly drinking parties. The mixtures that were made of every kind of Italian wine and liqueur (like *strega*), and the quantities absorbed, were not the best prescriptions for the liver. Besides, it was in this company chiefly composed of writers that I learned to drink myself, sometimes excessively, alas.

Russian songs were sung and Gorki intoned the songs of the Siberian prisoners. When I listened to his sad, nostalgic tunes and the somewhat muffled voice of this great son of Russia, I felt myself captivated

by his own peculiar charm. We often used to meet in the evenings at the Piccola Marina, in the house of Alexey Alexeyevich Zolotorëv, a writer too, who lived there with his brother. Neither of them was very young: one wore a country-style moustache, and the other a moustache and beard. I liked them both very much and they took me under their protection. The writer had escaped from a political prison; he was thin and looked like Don Quixote and a little like Gorki himself. There was a lively, solid friendship among these three men, and they drank hard together.

Marya Fëdorovna was extremely displeased when she found out that I used to follow this group of men from one café to another and drink with them. One was expected to drink, and I had not yet learned how to refuse. Of course, I sometimes saw double, and was even ill. Drinking did not agree with my unreliable appendix.

I still remember very clearly an evening when we were celebrating, in some favourite den of ours, the arrival of a Russian seaman who was also a writer. I finally became so fearfully homesick, thinking of my father, that I went and sat on Maxim Gorki's knee, kissed his moustache and told him that he looked rather like Father and that I quite sincerely loved him with all my heart, and that he must not drink too much!

He put his arm round my waist, and said:

"Listen, my friends. Do you see this lovely girl? Well, her name is Marya Morevna and she's the daughter of the King of the Sea. At the moment she's living on the Piccola Marina in a little house with one or two little dwarfs for servants. Anyone who dares to touch Marya Morevna shall feel the weight of my fist on his skull. Let us drink to Marya Morevna, *morskaya tsarevna* (the sea princess)!"

This is how I was christened with a name from a Russian tale; and the Russian colonies at Capri, Rome, and Paris, later on called me "Marevna" instead of "Morevna".¹ From this time I began signing my drawings and paintings with this name, as Gorki advised me.

"No one else will ever have a name like that, my dear enchantress," he said. "Be proud of it and be worthy of it."

When his wife intervened to protest, wishing to protect me from the drink, which was doing no good to her husband or to me, he replied:

¹ The pronunciation of the Russian *o*, if, as in this case, it has not the stress-accent on it, approximates to that of a (*Tr.*).

"Let her be, my dear. She won't be with us for ever. Better she should learn to drink in our company than with others. Besides, she's finding her feet – learning her capacity: it's very hard to learn to stop drinking, just at the right time. One has to know oneself for that. Her father, the sea king, will be grateful to us that his daughter, the sea princess, drinks like him."

"Oh, you shatter me with your stories," Marya Fëdorovna retorted. "Think of her father. Would he be pleased if he knew that his daughter was becoming a drunkard?" Then turning to me she brusquely advised me not to drink: "It's not pretty in a young girl like you, and you're spoiling your health and your beauty. And who for? For these idiotic *muzhiks*."

I thought of my father and swore I would be good; but I was still too young. The environment – the people, Capri, the climate, the magic – everything made me intoxicated. It was high summer, too, and very hot: we were very thirsty!

Gorki, his wife, Yura and their friends used to come to the Piccola Marina: what pleasant hours we spent there together; from the morning till noon, and again towards sunset, when the great heat began to subside, a whole small Russian world used to assemble, either to bathe or to refresh themselves on the terrace of the tiny *bistrot* nearby, where, with Gorki and the others, we ate delicious fried dishes and the specialities of the country, washing everything down with exquisite wine from Anacapri. It sometimes gave me great pleasure to invite my friends to come and try my *blinchiki*, a Russian dish – thick pancakes with jam and cream. I found it very difficult, but, after shutting myself for some time into the primitive kitchen, I had at last the pleasure and consolation of seeing my friends devour the *blinchiki* with undisguised avidity.

Sometimes Gorki read to us or related his memories: sitting round him in a circle we hung on every word, our gaze caught by the expression in his eyes, now laughing, now sombre. He seemed dreaming as he stared at the sea, which murmured softly under the burning noon-day sun. Gorki liked to walk about as he talked, and he gave impressions of people and events with gestures; it was a real treat for us all to hear and see this great personality giving expression to his thoughts.

We Russians considered the beach at Piccola Marina as our own and it went much against the grain to put up with outsiders. The Italians came very seldom, since they preferred the more popular Grande

Marina: we were not sorry for this, indeed, we were the happier; but sometimes our retreat was invaded by a crowd of English, men and women. With much curiosity and ill-suppressed giggles we watched the "ladies" come out of their bathing huts, dressed in black bathing dresses, gloved, wearing rubber boots and their heads covered by ludicrous bonnets. Only their pale faces were not attired. As for the "gentlemen", their legs and bodies were covered by long, striped bathing suits that clung to them, and they, too, wore shoes. These eccentric Puritans were a regular exhibition for us who went into the water wearing as little as possible! But the most incredible were the herds of Germans dressed *à la grecque*. The men, with long hair and beards, were either too fat or too skinny, and the women were far from the classical ideal of beauty. These Valkyries, masses of fat in their short tunics, were monstrous caricatures exposing their wan, gelatinous flesh. They hid behind rocks, left their tunics there and ran naked towards the astonished sea. Fortunately we only attended these séances from a distance. Someone told me that a colony of German nudists or naturists had been founded at Anacapri, which was interesting since it was the first colony of this kind. I cannot truly say, by the way, that the beauty of my Russian friends was in any way resplendent; only Gorki was handsome, long in the body, slender, beardless, a thoroughbred, but with something of a stoop. His feet and hands might have been envied by an aristocrat. I really think that physically he greatly resembled my father, and that would explain the great attraction to him that I felt from the earliest days.

I remember a delightful evening, walking with an Englishman and his two married friends over the hills among the olive trees, along a path which climbed steadily, and from which we could see the drowsy sea with the metallic glint of the moon shining on it from a sky studded with stars. It was as though a magic lamp was lighting us through that fairy landscape, in which only we four seemed to move, and our voices talking Italian, French or Russian were lost in the darkness. Here and there we would see the tiny boats of the night fishermen scattered over the sea; some were anchored and others moved slowly by the rocks with torches to surprise the sleeping fish.

I thought that the young wife, tall and rather big, was beautiful and very gentle. Her father was a doctor and lived not far from our street in Tiflis. She made enquiries about my family and my plans. Suddenly I felt a shock and, coming out of my apathy, I returned to the realities

of life: the memory of my father, his life of torment with the Golovashkins, his health endangered by his crushing labours. I felt terribly upset.

I thought the handsome Englishman was rather pretentious, but good looking, gay, healthy and full of the joy of living. (In Paris, later, I had an opportunity of judging him better, when I met him at the Russian Academy, where he ferreted me out and insisted on coming every evening to make sketches with his friends, Olga and Willi. His real place of work was the studio of Fauconnier, an artist of some standing, who was talked about for a certain time. Fauconnier's wife, Marusya, was a Russian, and she painted too. I do not know what the tragic event was that took her to the Hôpital Ste Anne (a famous lunatic asylum), which she left only to join so many others in the cemetery. I was interested in Fauconnier's work and I went several times to see him giving instruction but, perhaps because of poor Marusya's tragic death, I conceived an aversion for him and did not go there any more.)

There also came to "our" beach at Capri a few outsiders, whom I considered to be intruders: a German, a Greek and an Englishman, who a year later became my lover in earnest. Why? I do not know at all: I did not even think much of him. Doubtless the moment had arrived for me to become a woman.

4

IN ORDER TO TEASE GORKI AND HIS WIFE I ASKED YURA TO pose for me, and he agreed and came to my house.

When he learned of it Maxim Gorki said laughingly to Yura, in front of everybody:

"Take care, you know: she's a Caucasian witch. Today she's pretty and sweet, as you see: Morevna, *morskaya tsarevna*; but tomorrow she may transform herself into an evil black cat, all claws, and turn you into a dwarf, to be her slave for life."

Gorki smiled at me with his small eyes. Who knows? He may have

guessed the end of the story that Yura was beginning to live in my little house at the edge of the sea; for Yura came every day to pose for me, and this was the gradual beginning of a friendship which, on his side, grew, little by little, into a great love.

Just at this time Gorki fell seriously ill, and we had plenty of time to be alone together. Yura's father remained at home in bed, and we used to go in the evenings and ask Marya Fëdorovna in a low voice how he was.

"Very bad," she would answer, shaking her head sadly. "He's spitting blood. He absolutely must be stopped from drinking; and the best way to do that is not to drink with him: otherwise it'll kill him. Don't go away: stay here, and I'll get the samovar ready. Then he'll be obliged to drink nothing but tea."

Words of this kind upset me so much that I stopped drinking myself; but Gorki liked going out with his friends, and also liked to escape from the somewhat tyrannical surveillance of his wife. He was very gay by nature, and these sprees in the company of young people he was fond of made him feel, and even look, younger himself.

So when Chaliapine landed one fine day it was impossible to prevent the two famous men from having their fling. The singer, who had known Gorki for years and years, was terribly fond of drinking, alone or in company. The few days that he spent at Capri were magical for all of us. True, he drank, but he sang too, until late at night, and so marvellously that we were all spell-bound. His powerful voice overflowed the house and spread like a flood all over the hill and as far as Piccola Marina; and the Italians, yielding to its charm, lingered to listen on the threshold of their houses, or even came up to the villa.

Chaliapine also was an admirable story teller, just like Gorki. They vied with each other in telling tales about their past, of the time when they were still young vagabonds wandering across Russia, the steppe, the forests, or sailing down the Volga. Chaliapine had even been to the Caucasus, when he had been apprenticed to a coach-builder who had discovered his real talent and had induced him to study singing. The evenings grew protracted, for no one wanted to go away: the two great artists talked of the theatre, of art, of the politics of their country.

When Chaliapine went, Gorki had a serious relapse, and we feared for his life; but he was like a sturdy oak which, although worm-eaten, persists in remaining firm and upright. I was very fond of him indeed, although I never breathed a word of it to anyone; I even tried not to

think about it myself. I think he was fond of me, too, as of a dear, funny little girl. At all events, his illness cured me for a time of my passion for drinking.

There was one evening on which, if my memory serves me, I had invited a few friends to come and eat *bliny* (pancakes) and jam on the terrace of my house: there were the Gorki couple, the two Zolotorëv brothers and their wives, two or three painters, and Yura and I. People began to talk of Chaliapine, and to criticize his behaviour on a particular evening in the Moscow Arts Theatre. He was inclined to think of himself as a revolutionary since he came from the people and always supported their party; but, when he was playing the part of the patriotic *muzhik* in the opera *A Life for the Tsar*, he fell on his knees before Nicholas II's box and, in a voice which revealed his profound fervour, chanted the imperial anthem *God Protect the Tsar*. The incident caused a great scandal in revolutionary circles, and Chaliapine was accused of having let down the cause.

As they sat at the table Gorki and Yura began to raise their voices, Yura infuriating his father by saying that Chaliapine had no right to behave like that, even on the stage. Gorki squeezed his glass of wine in his fingers until it broke, and everyone was afraid he had cut himself, for the table cloth immediately showed red stains. But it was only wine. Yura stuck his knife into the wood of the table. It was not a very dignified scene, but for some reason I was proud of Yura that evening.

Gorki affirmed that everything must be permitted to such a great artist; that, engrossed in the part of a patriot, hypnotically possessed by his art which was calling into play all the powers of his soul, he might forget the misunderstandings which divided the people from the ministers and from the Tsar, there present in his box. Among the applause furious hissing and whistling had been heard from the gallery where the students were sitting. Everyone had risen and there had been brawls with the police, who on this gala evening were present in large numbers. Chaliapine had justified himself later on before his revolutionary friends: he had lost all sense of reality, all control of himself. He had literally worn the skin of the character he was acting, but the incident had been ever since the subject of quarrels and arguments among the admirers of the great singer. Gorki and Yura, at all events, were on bad terms for several days in consequence of that evening party, in spite of Marya's efforts to reconcile them.

It was not the first time, either, that all was not well between the two men; perhaps it was the fault of Marya Fedorovna. Some months later, at Paris, I was to learn that Gorki had parted from Andreyev's wife soon after my departure. Yura, too, wrote that the household had broken up, and that his mother wanted to leave for Moscow; at that time Yura himself was at Petrograd.

Gorki's first wife was in Paris with his adopted boy Maxim Peshkov: perhaps it was their existence that caused the break. Or was there another reason? May there have been a secret liaison, which Marya Fedorovna had discovered? (I heard then that Gorki loved "the woman", and that he was capable of great passion.) For myself I was sorry at their parting. Although Marya Fedorovna had her despotic, her *grande dame* side, she loved Gorki sincerely, and was very useful to him; but perhaps she felt herself reduced to a too modest rôle beside the great man who took everything for himself. She had formerly been so spoilt, so pampered from the time when she had been the favourite actress at the Moscow Arts Theatre: perhaps she found it too painful to put up with this exclusion any longer. It may also have been that she did not love him any more; or, on the other hand, did she love him too much? Or was it he who no longer loved her as she wished to be loved?

5

TIME WAS PASSING TOO QUICKLY. THE PAINTERS, BIRDS OF passage that they were, were preparing to leave Capri and our little family of Russian artists. They all promised to look after me if I went to Moscow or Petrograd with them; they encouraged me to leave, and to work under their guardianship. They really could not have been nicer. . . .

I remember, though, one of them, who had just arrived from Paris, escorting me back from the Grande Marina. He was a very practical man and, without wasting a minute, he brutally dragged me into an orchard. We rolled on the ground, and I bit him, scratched him savagely and pulled out some of his hair as I struggled. At last he let

me go, and after a minute he recovered from his fit of frenzy and asked me to forgive him. We were both still panting, dishevelled, covered with earth, our clothes in disorder.

"That's what's called declaring yourself with no waste of time and words," I said.

"But look at the scene," he replied. "The moon, the glittering sea over there, and the scents: can you smell them? A mixture of vines, orange trees and earth. Does it leave you cold? Doesn't it make you want to love? But that's not natural: it's monstrous, against nature!"

I answered that if I had been a man I should certainly be talking like him. The pity was that I was not really a man. Besides, I added, I did not even know him: I was seeing him for only the second or third time, and I thought it was a rather beastly way for him to behave; it was certainly devoid of all beauty, especially coming from an artist. As we walked – because in spite of everything he persisted in seeing me home – we talked more calmly. I declared that I was no more a hypocrite than I was a sadist; that I had been living in Capri for six months and had a copious list of potential lovers, and all I had to do was to choose; but all the same I preferred to remain a virgin for the time being, because in fact I enjoyed going counter to nature in this respect. I left it to others to follow the dictates of nature, to people of his breed. For myself, I intended to live at Capri as if I was in a fairy tale; and a fairy tale was poetry.

I never saw him again except in the distance. I am sure that he avoided me like the plague. I told Gorki what had happened, and he was very angry and had a couple of words with the man next day. Yura told me what he had said:

"Leave that girl alone," he demanded. "Others besides you would have liked to have a taste of her innocence and beauty: anyhow, she is not for you. Everyone here regards her and protects her. Besides, it would bring bad luck to lay a hand on an orphan from Kazan."

He was no longer in a rage, and smiled as he spoke. The painter, Grigorev, never knew exactly what my status was in the colony of artists; but he really did leave me alone from that day, and only rarely came to see Gorki.

JUST OPPOSITE MY HOUSE IN THE PICCOLA MARINA THERE was a little, rocky peninsula, the Sirens' Isle. In good weather one can go right out to the very tip of it, to admire the transparency of the deep water. The rock, steeped in sea water, looks as though it were worm-eaten; from close to one would think it was a huge sponge pierced by thousands of holes. During the very slight tides melodious music is heard rising, as though from a lyre or harp; and the legend tells how Ulysses, as he sailed by, heard the marvellous song of the Sirens. That is how the peninsula got its name.

One evening a lot of people gathered at my house to go and try to solve the mystery of this music, Maxim Gorki himself among them, with Marya Fëdorovna. The isle could be seen from the window of my room, and even better from the balcony. We were waiting for moon-rise and the water to be at the right height. The men were singing nostalgic Russian airs to pass the time; and I sang one of my favourite Georgian songs. The moon came up, round and brilliant, and we began to hear the waves slapping at the bottom of the house.

"Listen, now," someone said, "and don't move."

In profound silence, in my room illuminated by the moon, we listened to every slightest sound, rarely whispering to each other. Minutes passed, and our eyes glittered with excitement and curiosity. The men could not help smoking nervously. . . . Suddenly a very faint sound mounted gently to our ears. At moments it became loud enough for us to distinguish something like the music of the strings of a harp or a lyre. The notes formed a melody of extraordinary delicacy; we all held our breath.

"D'you hear them? They're singing now," someone whispered.

There were a few intervals of silence; the moon pursued her course in the starry sky. Then the melody fell still more distinctly on our ears, sometimes mingled with strange voices, a kind of angelic accompaniment, seeming to come from another world and making me shiver. All our nerves were taut. Suddenly someone sneezed, trying to suppress it, of course; but the spell was broken. Everyone started talking at once.

"A great success, really, the Sirens' song," said Alexey Alexeyevich's brother Nikolay, the friend of Gorki. "And yet it's as simple as ABC: the moon rises, the water rises too; the water enters these thousands of sponge-holes, and there you have a real natural organ. It's possible that one hears this sound even better out at sea, when it's

rough. That's why the *Odyssey* tells us that Ulysses heard the Sirens' song. With a little imagination. . . ."

"Really!" I protested. "No, no, no! If you don't believe that Ulysses saw the Sirens and the Cyclops, then I refuse to believe in the prophet Isaiah or the resurrection of Lazarus. No Sirens? Then why is Greek and Roman sculpture full of them? Why should I believe in angels, with feathered wings and white linen shirts? After all, the Bible and the Gospels are only marvellous religious poems, full of imagination, as you say, to maintain Christians in their faith. . . ."

"Steady on, Marusya," Marya Fëdorovna interrupted. "There's a little rebel for you!"

"The tsarevna's right," Gorki intervened. "She knows what to think better than we do too: she's in her own kingdom here. The Sirens exist: we must believe it: whoever does, is right. I want to believe in them too. Our friend Alexey Alexeyevich does, I'm sure."

"Yes, I do," Alexey replied. "But that's poetry. Poets believe in everything which is marvellous and unreal. If my brother doesn't believe in it, I'm sorry for him. He's too matter-of-fact. Long live poetry and the Sirens!"

On some days we set off by boat early in the morning for the whole day, to do some serious fishing. In order to avoid the greatest heat of the day the ladies waited for the seasoned fishermen in the shelter of small grottoes. I would go with the fishermen and Gorki far out to sea. We caught big fish in nets and on hooks, and came back before sunset, picking up the ladies on the way; and we had hardly gone ashore before *ushnoye* (fish soup) was cooking. We stretched out, along with the Italian fishermen, round a great cauldron, and Marya Fëdorovna helped each of us to the pungent soup, with its onions and grated cheese. Other victuals were produced from baskets, and bottles, "because fish like swimming". Gay stories, fishing adventures, songs - Russian and Italian mingled - all helped to maintain the joyous feast and sharpen the appetite; and when the first stars showed themselves everyone made off hastily to avoid the water which was slowly invading the grottoes. We went back to the Piccola Marina, our nets still bulging with fish, gaiety in our hearts, and our faces scorched with salt and sun: my nose had to grow a new skin each time.

MY LIFE AT CAPRI WAS A COMPLETE FANTASY. I DID NOT LIVE, but was held in a waking dream; and about me I saw people who had lived impassioned lives, working, struggling, suffering for humanity. In those few months with Gorki at Capri I had grown up and matured. One day, however, when my return and plans for me to work at an academy in Petrograd or Moscow were once more being discussed, I declared resolutely that I would rather go to Paris and work there. Besides, even if this had been the only objection, I was really terrified of the Russian climate.

Gorki said to me one day, pulling his moustache: "*Poyedete v Parizh – ugorite*" (Go to Paris and you'll be asphyxiated).

On the other hand, painters who had lived in Paris, and knew what its merits were and the benefits an artist found there, encouraged me to go. Alexey Alexeyevich and his brother both urged me, and promised to help me to succeed in this city which would be so new to me.

When Yura learned about my wish to go to Paris, he became gloomy and tense. Our comradeship evolved very quickly in those last days. In spite of all his mother's counselling of prudence, he confessed that he loved me deeply, madly, for ever; and he asked me to marry him. This was so comic, so unexpected, that I had not the courage to refuse him. He was kind, intelligent and as nice as could be: he surrounded me with everything I lacked: a deep affection and at all times an atmosphere of simplicity and confidence. I knew that my father could only be profoundly pleased at such a marriage. My life, too, might receive a fresh stimulus and take a new turn, perhaps in quite another direction. Vast horizons lay open before me. He was an invalid, it was true. His mother worshipped him and thought only of his happiness; but, although she had a presentiment that I was her enemy, her behaviour to me at this time was extremely fair and generous; and it hurt me very much, eventually, to give her pain.

When Yura revealed to her his wish to celebrate our engagement before I left for Paris, she acquiesced without raising the least objection. She ordered the rings and sent for stuffs to make me two frocks and some blouses. She did not like the way I dressed: I wore neither stays nor *soutien-gorge*; I left my body free and – so she thought – too tempting in its covered nakedness.

I was afraid, then, to refuse Yura, in case I should hurt him, and he was brimming with joy and happiness. He jumped and ran, despite his crippled leg, to show me he was a boy like other boys. In the evenings

I used to stay with him till late, and we sat down among the rocks, gazing at the enchanted landscape. In the silence everything was at rest. If we were on a hill the sound of the calm sea rose towards us, hardly louder than a breath, and we could hear our hearts beating. If we were at the Piccola Marina, on the beach or at my house, the gentle murmur of the waves was only a little louder, under my window or on the unpeopled sand. I was pensive and for most of the time silent: I could not help imagining Kay in Yura's place. My heart did not belong to this boy, or anyhow not as much as he would have wished.

I had yielded to pity: I had to make this gesture of kindness to thank the family and those people who had shown me nothing but goodness and hospitality. I had told myself that this gesture was called for from me, both by the Gorki family and by my father, who aspired only to see me safe and secure. I had resolved that instead of running about everywhere with men by moonlight, and tumbling in the grass or on the sand, as some of the girls of my age did, I would learn to be good and make someone really happy. I do not know whether Maxim Gorki approved of my accepting Yura. There was no change in his kindness, and I think that for Yura he was pleased; but he would sometimes screw up his face at me and repeat, though nicely: "You witch: you witch," gazing at me with his blue, smiling eyes: and he would shake his head.

All the artists had gone, or nearly all; even the birds had left us. Great clouds began to form above the sea, but at noon it was still hot. Everywhere one saw the brilliance of roses, mimosa and geraniums blooming on all the terraces and the old walls. One evening our engagement was fêted. (I had still told my father nothing about this. After all, we were not married yet. Did I feel a presentiment of a coming rift?)

Then one day I packed my big wicker trunk and suitcase, and knew I must make up my mind to bid a sad farewell to Maxim Gorki, Marya Fëdorovna and Alexey Alexeyevich, whose brother had already left for Paris, where he was to join his wife.

"Don't forget to put on two pairs of drawers in Paris, witch, and to cover your throat. The climate is worse than it is in Moscow. Beware of men, but don't be afraid of them: on the contrary; that will be your strength." Those were the last words that Gorki spoke to me, in his cordial way, kissing me three times, *à la russe*. Marya Fëdorovna kissed me too, and said: "I have confidence in you. Yura will go with you as far as Naples. He will come and see you in Paris before he leaves

for Moscow. You must arrange your life for yourselves." Feeling very sad, I kissed everybody. I was never to see Gorki or his wife again. Yura did come to see me in Paris, and spent a few days staying with some friends of mine who were putting me up.

8

IT WAS IN THE AUTUMN OF 1912 THAT I TRAVELLED TO PARIS from Naples. In the train a handsome young Neapolitan had tried to make friends with me, and paid me a thousand compliments on my beauty and gracefulness. We talked in Italian, which I spoke better than I did French. He told me that he was going to Paris to study at the Sorbonne; and to his numerous questions I replied that I was going to Paris too, to learn painting. We talked of *la bella Italia*; the young man was not stupid but, like Vesuvius, a trifle volcanic in his passions, so that I was most grateful to *le bon Dieu* when I saw a charming, old French couple come and sit in our compartment. For the fun of it I concealed from the young man that I had some friends who would be meeting me at the Gare de Lyon, so, thinking me to be alone and ignorant, he offered me his protection, promising to be my guide and to show me the places where people went at nights to enjoy themselves. He said it was worth the trouble, if only to see how students and artists lived in Paris, and added that one could enjoy oneself even if one had no money. He promised to get me a room in his hotel in the boulevard Saint-Michel (which students call the *boul' Mich'*). He made discreet enquiries about my means and my father's, and about his social position. I began to laugh secretly as I thought of Lishov's first gallantries at Moscow, his amorous eagerness, his curiosity about myself and my family and his hankering for my ignorant youthfulness and my money.

The next morning I was woken by the sound of the bell announcing the first service of breakfast. I opened my eyes, and was flabbergasted to see that I had served as a pillow for my enterprising Italian. He was still sleeping tranquilly, his handsome head resting on my knees. The

old French couple were smiling slyly, but I saw red, I was so angry at the conduct of this perfect stranger, to whom I had not given the least encouragement. Such a liberty enraged me and I briskly stretched out my benumbed legs and woke the sleeper, calling him by a coarse Italian epithet, "*mascalzone!*" My Romeo gazed at me with astonishment in his fine, brown, wide-open eyes, without understanding, all the same, why I had disturbed him. "*Scusi, scusi, signorina carina:* I was having such a good sleep, and such lovely dreams!" I told myself that if all students and artists in Paris resembled this one I should have to do a lot of fighting. In Russia and at Capri I had seen and understood that there might exist a certain familiarity between a girl and a boy, but no Slav young man would have behaved like this. He would give up his seat to a lady or a young girl, if he wanted her to like him, but he would never have used her as a pillow! At last I calmed down, my anger cooled and finally I burst out laughing. We were running into Paris, the capital of the world! All my curiosity was roused as the train passed the fortifications in the suburbs, and the little wooden huts surrounded by tiny kitchen gardens. At last the first old Paris houses appeared: under the grey sky their walls, blackened by smoke from the trains and covered with advertisements in colour inviting me to drink *du bon Dubonnet*, Curaçao and Martini, and then, further on, suggesting that I should take a course of Vittel for the kidneys or Vichy for the liver! Javel bleaching fluid offered me linen whiter than that spread on the balconies, drying in black, smelly dust. Through the windows of these houses one could see the pale-faced housewives making the beds, desperately shaking out dubious sheets, blankets and faded carpets. Was this Paris? Paris which made me squirm in my dreams? Then I recalled my overwhelming excitement when I arrived at Moscow, and later at Rome. Those two cities had given me a different welcome. Approaching Moscow one had the impression that the town was glittering under the gold of its innumerable cupolas, and the delirious noise of the bells made me dizzy. The Kremlin itself looked like a fairy-tale castle and drew me towards it, conquered and quivering. Rome greeted me with resplendent, violent sunlight. I was stirred by the ancient city, surrounded with green hills, by its imposing, majestic St Peter's that I knew contained a thousand and one treasures within its walls, by its strangeness, its noises, and by the smells that only an Italian town can release.

But my disappointment with Paris changed quickly, as soon as I

left the station and its gloomy neighbourhood and penetrated further into that disturbing, alluring town. As soon as the train stopped in the station I hastened, in great agitation, to attach my indispensable samovar carefully to my suitcase, the samovar which continuously provides the boiling tea so dear to the Russians on their numerous travels. My handsome Italian called a porter and authoritatively told him to put our luggage together and take it to a taxi. He effected my exit from the train in the same autocratic spirit: he took me uncere- moniously by the waist and put me down firmly on the platform swarm- ing with people. (I have always had a soft spot in my heart for stations. That is where one leaves what one loves most, where one abandons one's troubles and pains, where one arrives full of hope and certainty for the future.) At last, at the critical moment, I saw my two Russian friends coming towards me with their friendly, smiling faces, and without waiting I hurled myself into their arms. With no regret I left my fiery travelling companion in the lurch, thanking him ironically for all his kindness. I asked my friends in Russian to recover my lug- gage from my despotic young tyrant, who by now was livid with rage at the thought that I had played him such a trick. He followed us for a while, muttering some rather unseemly words directed at me: and I never saw my good-looking, enterprising sleeping companion again. He had become vulgar and ugly. My friends asked for an explanation of the young man's improbable behaviour, and I gaily told them the story of my involuntary conquest. I sat with them in a cab, looking eagerly to right and left. Paris was dressed with countless flags which gave it a gala appearance. The Alexeyeviches explained to me that the reason for the decoration of the town was that there had been an International Exhibition of Decorative Arts. My friends lived a long way from the Gare de Lyon, so I had the opportunity of watching the outward appearance of Paris life on the day of my arrival, and after- wards when I went out for walks.

The streets swarmed with people: newspaper sellers running and shouting their heads off with the latest news in the *Paris-Soir*, *L'Intran.*, etc., or standing at street corners, or stationed in kiosks covered with advertisements in screaming colours which announced shows to fit every different taste. There were women with barrows selling flowers or vegetables to a large number of customers, and fishwives, with their hoarse, shrill southern voices, crying up their wares to the housewives; they were a curious, gay spectacle, these walking markets, the "Four

Seasons". The short, pleated skirts that the market women wore showed their rounded knees and their firm calves sheathed in black woollen stockings. Their shoulders were covered with a *caraco*, a knitted jacket with the neck high at the back, and they wore polished, black wooden shoes with red heels. They wore the most improbable hats and sometimes, when their hair was arranged and pomaded in the Spanish style, they had almost the look of saucy *cocottes*. Permanent waving was hardly known in those days and women piled their hair in a bun on the top of their heads.

I took in all these details with curiosity, and with eyes that were accustomed to observing. Chestnuts roasted in the open air were already being sold, and the appetizing smell made me want to bite into their warm, firm substance. Fried potatoes were for sale too, served with hot little pink sausages, cooked on portable stoves. I was often to treat myself, in the time to come, to these dishes of the people, delicious but, alas! fearfully indigestible. There were plenty of cabs with lean horses harnessed to them, painfully hobbling along and dragging their heavy loads, being continually passed by noisy and self-confident red taxis. I preferred the old cabs with their poor, panting horses – no doubt remembering my childhood. Heavy drays loaded with sacks of coal and wood for the coming winter caused spectacular traffic blocks, to my great joy and amusement. The movement of the traffic along the main arteries of Paris might have been better, and I was aware that, being on foot, I risked having an accident, even being crushed unceremoniously by one of the omnibuses drawn by huge, restive horses, or by one of the early electric trams, or one of those famous red taxis. Crossing a main road in Paris in those days was a real adventure. I also noticed for the first time, here and there on the boulevards, queer iron screens which carried a famous advertisement for Chocolat Menier. Men half disappeared behind the screens: their straddled feet were still visible, and so were their heads under bowler hats or caps, or turbans, or the *calotte* of a stray priest. The whole thing looked so odd that I could not help laughing and slyly asking Alexey to explain these extraordinary erections.

"Why, those are the *vespasiennes*, Marie Marevna, the pride of Paris." I remembered seeing nothing like this in Moscow, Tiflis or even in Rome. In those towns men of all classes urinated against the walls, the trees and unguarded gates. I myself, during my long walks about the eternal city, would take cover in a deserted yard, or behind

some half-built house; I found this quite natural. In Rome and Naples at that time even well-dressed ladies would stop and, paying no attention to people passing, would raise their skirts and relieve themselves, going on with their conversation; and the crowd went by wholly indifferent. The Alexeyeviches explained to me that there were Chocolats Menier for women too, but that these were situated near the stations and on the main boulevards. Another recourse was to go and order something in a café or a licensed restaurant, where the W.C. might always be used by the customers.

It was a rather small, modest establishment where my Russian friends lived. I stayed with them for three weeks, impatiently waiting for Yura to arrive. When he did, we decided to make do with bivouacking in the Russian style, our hosts sleeping on a mattress on the floor and we two occupying their beds. We did the cooking together, displaying to each other our talent in this line. Yura turned out to be the more expert. Then, sitting or lying on the carpet, we spent the evenings drinking wine to the health of our most dear Maxim Gorki, recalling the days we had spent in his company, and the precious, unforgettable times in enchanted Capri; and intense melancholy would grip our homesick hearts.

Yura stayed for a fortnight, which we spent visiting the Louvre and several exhibitions of modern art, of whose excellence he was quite ignorant, which very much disappointed me. In the evenings we strolled about the streets or along the boulevards, where heaps of chestnut leaves lay on the ground. It was still quite mild, but damp. Gas jets shone on the wet, slippery pavements.

Parisian lovers had no hesitation in kissing each other wherever they might be. On benches, where it was dark, they sprawled intertwined and motionless in their amorous ecstasy. When we passed close to such a couple Yura overflowed with false high spirits, talking without a stop and seeming tipsy. Just before he left Paris he begged me to spend a few hours with him at a hotel, for at home we felt cramped by the presence of our friends. I consented, but in the hotel room, although it was cheered by the sunshine and the noises from the street, I felt most unhappy. I saw myself back at Capri, with its intoxicating scents, where one was always in love, where one remained in a tight embrace, without moving or speaking, listening to the whisper of the sea and the breeze in the leaves of the olive trees. I knew that next day Yura was going far away, and that now he was suffering: he

did not know what to do or what to say. When one is in love one is often paralysed like this. It was I who found the courage to caress him – an admission? Pity or affection? I do not know what made me do it. I did know that I should never see him again. He was desperately pleased by this simple act of mine, and afterwards he began to weep. I took him in my arms and rocked him like a child, as he had once lulled me at Capri. Then we went back to spend a last evening *à la russe*, drinking tea and singing Gorki's songs and my songs from the Caucasus. What nostalgia, what regrets there were in those memories. People without recollections must be very poor and unhappy.

9

IN PARIS I THOUGHT YURA VERY NICE, LOVING BUT DULL, perhaps a bit stupid, too young for me and lacking in resolution and penetrator. He irritated me by singing Russian ballads in his *tenorino* voice, and to dispel my black mood he would play me the *Valse du chien* on the piano with two fingers! – me, who adored music both serious and light. The more bored I was with him the more he whined. In short, I was the boy and he the girl. I did not desire him at all, but I felt for him a tranquil, friendly mixture of pity for his poor, shrunken leg and affectionate gratitude for the happy days at Capri. The idea of marrying him seemed odious and ludicrous, and in course of time I became unkind and unfair to him. At Capri the charm of Gorki was reflected in everything and everybody; our lives followed, as it were, in the wake of the great man; and on top of this there was the spell of Capri itself.

Yura said that we should go and live where I liked, in Petrograd or Moscow; in the summer we could go to Finland, where there was a house for the two of us. His mother would leave us free to do as we wished. I found this hard to believe: I could see quite well that she was a strong-minded woman with a possessive and obstinate nature. It is possible that if my father had been by my side at that moment, to advise and encourage me, I would have consented to marry Yura, for

my father's sake alone; certainly my wretched childhood and adolescence at the Golovashkins' were the cause of my indecision. I was repelled by the thought of a family headed by a woman with a will of her own, and I was really terrified of being jostled, misunderstood and maltreated, as I had been till then.

When I later told my Russian friends that I had decided to break off my engagement to Yura, because I was not in love with him, they urged me to do nothing of the sort. I should marry Yura, they said, because it was a good marriage, and I should profit by it from every point of view, especially since Gorki would be able to protect me. I could always divorce him later on, and do well out of it. I very much disliked such advice, for to behave like that was clean against my nature.

After Yura left my friends found me two rooms on the fourth floor of a building in the rue Méchain, beside the boulevard de la Santé and not far from the famous Santé prison, from which I was separated by the boulevard and the pretty garden of the house where I lived. The high, grey, gloomy walls, and the little cell windows, firmly barred, made a striking contrast with the fine, blossoming chestnuts and the gay shrubs in the garden, among which, in spring and summer, the blackbirds whistled from morning till night. Sometimes I would stay with my elbows on the window sill, watching the coming of night with its soft shades of blue, pink and mauve in the shadows. Little by little the trees lost their green colour and their shape, were changed into a mass of reddish brown, and then became dark. The misty sky cleared here and there, and glittering stars winked mysteriously at me. How hard and cold the lights of the prison seemed beside all this. I breathed in the fresh, balmy scent from the garden, and I felt very happy, compared with the unfortunates locked in behind the walls opposite. I was heartily sorry for them, and on days when I stayed at home to work I could not help often thinking of them. This distressing proximity was the reason why I afterwards moved to a studio.

One day I went to the Rotonde, the café where all the painters in Paris used to meet. It was more than a social meeting place: they almost lived there, and came together like one big family. I wanted to find out the address of the Russian Academy, of which I had heard well at Capri. In this little café-bar, at the well-known crossing of the boulevards Raspail and Montparnasse, an artist newly arrived in Paris would get all the necessary directions. It was very different from what it later became. M. Leblanc, the *patron*, who was a butcher, and whose

shop stood next door to this international resort, had just acquired it. He had very soon become a kind of father to favourites and chosen neophytes whom he spotted among this little world of artists, always hard up and always looking for moral support. For the majority of French artists, and more so for foreign ones, life in Paris was harsh and pitiless, often lonely and bounded on every side by sheer destitution. Père Leblanc treated them to *café-crème*, hot *croissants* and *sauerkraut* on credit, which was never paid off; but the good man was glad to accept a few sketches or a canvas as compensation for his expenses. This is how he began to make a collection of pictures which grew from day to day, among which were canvases by Modigliani, Kisling, Soutine, Krémègne, Ortis and others, and even one of mine. His good humour and his fatherly advice were a valued comfort to us all. I had occasion, later on, to appreciate deeply the big fellow's friendliness, considerateness and benevolence.

It was at the Rotonde, then, that I discovered without any difficulty the address of the Russian Academy.

The student in charge, Bulakovsky, was a Russian sculptor; his predecessor had been a painter called Marie Vasilev, who was said to be very gifted. She had left after numerous rows for which she had been responsible, and she had been asked to resign. When I arrived I heard that she had opened a canteen for artists in her studio in the avenue du Maine. (The canteen became celebrated during the 1914 war.) I had the opportunity afterwards of making her acquaintance in very different circumstances, sometimes amusing, often embarrassing.

The Academy, where I soon began work, was frequented by many Russian artists, among them Anna Orlov, who later made a name for herself as a sculptor, and Zadkine, with a fringe of hair on his forehead and his very marked Semitic charm. He was very talented, a sort of stormy *Jupiter tonans*, full of gaiety and wit, especially when he had a few glasses of wine inside him. He had hewn out for himself the place he occupied among the sculptors of the world. There were also the coming painters like Krémègne, and the shy Soutine, always melancholy, who was likewise to become celebrated. I shall talk of him later.

On the evenings devoted to sketching the little hall was always full to overflowing, and it was difficult to find room at a bench or on anything that might serve as a seat; but our passion for work was such that we willingly put up with discomfort. I met Willi and his Russian wife, Olga Sakharov, whose talent for painting was already recognized. I had

known them rather vaguely at Capri. I liked the atmosphere of the academy and I used to go every day to paint and to study models from the life.

One evening, however, it happened that I had gone to work at drawing at the Colarossi Academy, in the rue de la grande Chaumière. The crowd there was thicker still: the building was filled with a whole army of young students of all nationalities, and all the rooms were packed. In the one where we were drawing from the nude the air was stifling, because of an overheated stove. We were positively melting in an inferno permeated by the strong smell of perspiring bodies mixed with scent, fresh paint, damp waterproofs and dirty feet; all this was intensified by the thick smoke from cigarettes and the strong tobacco of pipe smokers. The model under the electric light was perspiring heavily and looked at times like a swimmer coming up out of the sea. The pose was altered every five minutes, and the enthusiasm and industry with which we all worked had to be seen to be believed.

The clothed models, men, women and children, were often Italian, dressed in the Neapolitan fashion. They looked as though they had recently disembarked from a voyage from Naples and were completely out of their element in the chilly fog of Paris.

Besides our work we had the daily business of going to the museums and exhibitions. I wrote excited letters to Father, that I was making good use of my time and hoped soon to be in a position to earn my living. The last words were intended to encourage him, for he was sending me at the end of every month a substantial sum, and providing me with everything I could wish for. His generosity allowed me to live a carefree life and to pass for a very fortunate girl in the eyes of my companions. He never mentioned in his letters what might be going on at home, but spoke of an early meeting with me (probably in Poland). He seemed to me to be much preoccupied with the events unfolding themselves at Tiflis, where all was not well, for the attitudes to each other of the Russian, Armenian and Tatar governments were becoming more and more strained.

Gradually I forsook my Russian friends from Capri and only saw my compatriots at charity balls, organized either for the benefit of needy artists or to provide aid for the Russian colony. I was always invited to these affairs, and I played my part energetically, helping at the buffet or moving about among the gathering, selling glasses of vodka and hot honey. I was usually dressed as a young *muzhik*,

wearing wide, baggy trousers, boots, and the traditional shirt embroidered in red. On my fair, curly head I wore a magnificent astrakhan *papakha*, a present from my father. This disguise allowed me to be more comfortable, and I enjoyed playing the clown, leaping and dancing. Everyone liked me, and the thirsty dancers enjoyed buying my perfumed liqueurs, calling me "Stepka" and asking me to drink with them to the health of our venerable Russia.

Those first balls were a novelty for me, and I enjoyed them madly. They had begun to be held in 1911 and were organized in the great picturesque halls of the "Moulin de la Galette", and also in a big *brasserie*, called "La Closerie des Lilas", and in the "Salle Bullier", which was very well known at that time and perhaps the best regarded. The people who came to them were a very mixed lot. The upper crust of the Russian colony might be seen there, people belonging to French society, and the representatives of industrial, literary and medical circles who were amateurs and patrons of modern painting. Journalists and art-critics were there in plenty, and, lastly, the artists themselves.

At these entertainments I used later to meet Lunacharski and his wife, who only knew me by the surname "Marevna", given me by Gorki, which I have retained.

The public liked coming to these balls out of curiosity, attracted by the amusing advertisements that promised them a sight of well-known players from the music-halls and the French stage, and also of celebrated Russian actors. There was a platform for performers, and two orchestras uninterruptedly played irresistible, jerky tunes or furious valse. The dance floor was surrounded by tables for those who wanted to dine or to drink champagne, and all along the wall there were chairs for dancers to sit in and rest. There were green shrubs everywhere, and masses of scented flowers from the Côte d'Azur, and many-coloured lanterns and cunningly woven garlands gaily decorated the ballroom. The artists who had helped with the decorations also exhibited their canvases, and these were auctioned afterwards, the money being used for the benefit of our less fortunate compatriots.

Sometimes there were boxes on the balconies with red velvet curtains, in which stood little tables with white tablecloths, lit by lamps with shades of flattering colours. These were reserved for pairs of lovers and for important people who wished to preserve their incognito.

The buffet, which played a very important part, was situated at the further end of the room, and was made up of several tables on which

there was an impressive selection of sandwiches and *zakuski* (Russian hors-d'oeuvre) and a variety of drinks to tempt the thirsty.

Behind these tables were the ladies of the committee, cordial and attractive. It sometimes happened that "customers", seduced by their charms, willingly ate up all these delicacies, the prices of which, as at all such charitable affairs, were exorbitant and beyond the reach of a poor artist.

At the start of the evening, at eleven o'clock, the atmosphere was tense and full of uneasiness. With feverish impatience the committee awaited the arrival of the public and the serious spenders. When the hall was full the performers did their acts and always had the same great success with a public that asked nothing better than to enjoy itself, and the spectators, encouraged by the limelight, thawed as they drank and danced as if possessed.

Towards two in the morning the party reached its zenith; everyone was enlivened by wine: dancers could be seen to stumble, and bursts of laughter became noisier and noisier – to say nothing of red, breathless faces. Since Slavs love singing, choirs were improvised, and I often took part in these performances. How beautiful the singing was! The atmosphere of over-excitement, whether stimulated by alcohol, music or dancing, produced a general brotherliness. Nostalgia, dreams, suffering, were all reflected in these songs of the Russian people, and the public greatly appreciated the extemporaneous choirs. One could feel oneself becoming benevolent, happy and carefree. I was overjoyed because the people from the Caucasus considered me as one of themselves and entertained me royally.

At last, towards five or six in the morning, the excitement began to diminish visibly, and then the ballroom rapidly emptied. I left in my turn, accompanied by my friends, and the fresh, icy air of those winter nights took my breath away. After spending so many hours in such a stifling atmosphere the shock which I experienced by going out of doors woke me up abruptly from my half-pretended tipsiness. A kind of damp, bluish mist seemed to have entirely swallowed up the streets and houses. Nothing could be distinguished at a distance of ten paces. The lamp-posts with their gas-jets rose from the darkness two feet away, surrounded by a halo of pale orange light, dismal and uncertain. We walked in noisy groups, looking for an open café-bar where we could warm ourselves with a scalding *café-crème*, and there, among workmen, we waited for the Métro to open. In the streets the rag-

pickers, grotesque shadows of men and women with baskets on their backs, looking like sinister humpbacks, rummaged about with iron hooks among the refuse-bins, and these were upset in turn by stray dogs and cats quarrelling over rotting remains of food. At last we disappeared into the Métro, close on the heels of the pale, sleepy workmen. We were nauseated by the warm air, which smelt of some sickly, sweetish disinfectant.

In the train, piled one on top of another, we felt a bit ridiculous beside the men wearing dungarees and shabby leather great-coats, or perhaps in just a thin, soiled jacket. These men, dispirited, gloomy, badly shaven, the stump of a cigarette hanging at the corners of their mouths, looked at us with ironical indifference. One of them would say, derisively: "Well, my beauty, you'll have had some fun with the boys: they're lucky; you're a pretty doll!" and I would laugh embarrassedly. The aftertaste of the first *apéritif*, mixed with the dainties I had eaten the night before, was making me feel rather sick. I felt guilty in the presence of these men: they had got up so early to work, while I would soon be in bed, on my soft, comfortable sofa, forgetting the fatigues of the mad night, which would result in a day's work lost. Sometimes, if it was a fine night and I was too tired to walk, my friends would enjoy carrying me on their strong, young shoulders for as long as possible, for they knew that I was liable to an attack of rheumatism after a night of too much excitement.

These Russian balls did not always end without unpleasant episodes, which did break the monotony, but gave a bad impression to mealy-mouthed people who quite justifiably considered these unforeseen incidents in bad taste. On the other hand, where could one find, before the war of 1914, such an atmosphere, wild, but full of taste, as was to be found at our Russian balls? Nowhere. The unbridled *lezginkas*, performed before spectators unrestrainedly crying "Tash! tash! tash! tash!" hands clapping more and more quickly, dancers, as if hypnotized, whirling, bounding, capering round a single *danseuse* who hardly moved, but provoked them to these delirious paroxysms with her tantalizing gaze. . . . Or perhaps it was the famous *kinzhal* dance, with the body stiff and the blade of the dagger gripped between the teeth. We were all intoxicated by these old nostalgic dances and songs full of frenzied gaiety. It needed only a real cavalcade on unbroken horses to evoke my memories of festivities in the Caucasus.

For my part, my youth and vitality rejoiced in, even demanded,

such violent exploits. I had been too good at Moscow, Rome and Capri, where I had led the life of a romantic girl; now my tomboy, hoydenish side, which I had liked showing at Tiflis, awoke again, and it was in this spirit that I went looking for brawls and acts of violence, and I must admit that often I was myself the cause of the disorder which interrupted balls which were too staid for my taste. This reminds me of a little incident which I shall describe. One evening, dressed as usual as Stepka, the young *muzhik*, I was selling vodka and hot honey *à la polonaise*. A gross, vulgar fellow who was drunk bought two glasses from me, paying generously since the profit went to the artists; but the horrible creature wanted, into the bargain, to force a kiss on my mouth, when his own was greasy and full of saliva. He said he had paid enough to deserve a kiss, and he caught hold of me with all his strength and crushed me against his great belly. I gave him a couple of rattling boxes on the ear, upon which he pushed me roughly away, cursing and swearing. I fell down with my tray of glasses and bottles, which broke with a crash, and sprawled myself at the feet of a dancing couple, who fell on top of me in their turn. The man was laid hold of by indignant bystanders and magisterially punished with a good kick in the rear; he ended up with two black eyes as well and the sleeve of his dinner-jacket badly torn. I was fêted, and a cut on my hand which I had doubtless got from the broken glass was dressed: I was bleeding like a pig. I had earned the right to champagne, and I kept my arm bandaged for the rest of the evening with great pride. Of course there were people who blamed me for the row: everyone has his own opinion.

Another time, however, I went too far. I had had rather too much hot honey and vodka, and this emboldened me to offer glasses free to some of my colleagues who were not well off, and certainly could not afford luxuries at millionaires' prices. More, I thought that having collected enough money for the committee's cash-box I might allow myself this slight generosity without risking censure. It was not to be so, for one of the ladies of the committee, who was in charge of the buffet, was standing behind a table loaded with delicious hors-d'oeuvre, slyly watching me. At every ball where we worked together she jealously followed my movements out of the corner of her eye; she disliked my youthfulness, my success with the public, everything about me, and she seized the first opportunity that offered itself to damage me in the eyes of the committee. "Look here, Stepka," she shouted in a spiteful voice, "don't give yourself too much trouble;

but you must pay for your friends like everyone else. That's not very honest, what you're doing." What was the use of wasting time by answering her in words? Action was what was needed, so I shoved the table till it overturned with the lovely refreshments for sale – *zakuski*, pastries and all. My goodness, what a mess! Broken plates, and hors-d'oeuvre mixed with vanilla ices! The good lady screamed and finally fainted with rage. The other committee ladies were astounded, and evinced no sympathy for me and reproached me bitterly for my behaviour. They demanded that I should be turned out at once. Everyone began asking questions. "Who is it?" "Why, it's Marevna, Maxim Gorki's friend: you can't treat her like this. She's always done everything she could for the committee. Something must have happened to hurt her feelings." My anger passed, and I began giggling and could not stop. One of the more elderly ladies, with her face too much made up, wore an outraged expression because the lace of her frock and train was still ornamented with Russian salad. I picked up the remains of the cucumber and tomatoes, my head held low, and trying to stifle my giggles; but when I stood up the lady asked me why I had upset the buffet. I answered that it was very dangerous to drink too much hot honey and vodka on an empty stomach, and that no one had warned me. I took my leave of her without disclosing any further details. This kind lady was the wife of the famous collector of pictures, Gustave Kahn, who afterwards took a great interest in my work and became my Maecenas. It was he who was always saying: "We must make sure of you, Marevna. You've got the stuff in you to make a great painter." And his wife would advise me with a smile: "You mustn't be so violent, little Marevna: with your talent and your charm everything will go all right." Two very different admonitions, very difficult to follow in my tempestuous, undisciplined life.

These Russian balls were children's games compared with the ones given by the artists from the Académie des Beaux Arts.

We went one evening to the *Quat'z Arts* ball, two boys dressed as cavemen and I, with my hair loose on my shoulders, and two birds' nests as a *soutien-gorge*, looking like a real prehistoric woman; we were all dressed in furs. When we got there, it was to find debauchery unlike anything I had ever known, and I was so ashamed and revolted that in spite of myself I wept. My partner, surprised and amused, suggested we should leave, but the thought that my modesty might be taken for hypocrisy induced me to stay.

In the middle of the night a fire broke out. The way the people, drunk or not far off it, panicked and shoved was a terrifying sight; most harrowing of all were the cries of the women, nearly all naked, who were ready to rush out of doors in their alarm, uttering heart-rending screams and trampling on each other like a herd of beasts. The fire was got under control, however, but the dancers were well be-daubed with acrid smoke and falling soot. I am bound to say that at dawn, when the crowd began to disperse, and we found ourselves in the street again, we had great fun. We looked more like devils and she-demons than cave-dwellers. I could not walk any more, because of all the round dances and farandoles I had danced, so I was put in a wheelbarrow, and this was the carriage in which I arrived in the yard of the Académie des Beaux Arts. The last madmen who had not been sobered by the dawn still had the strength to dance in the basin of a fountain. One beautiful girl hoisted herself up to the top and took a showerbath under the icy water. It was the most lovely vision I have ever seen. In the gilded light of the rising sun immortal Venus was being born of the waters, pink and russet, with her long hair loose. An excited cry arose: "Hurrah! Long live beauty, art, and love!"

I was told she caught pneumonia as a result of this exploit of hers, and died in hospital a few days later.

As for me, I ached so all over that for two days I ~~could~~ not walk: my picture waited for me, propped up on its easel in the Louvre.

IO

AT THE ROTONDE ONE DAY A BEARDED MAN WAS INTRODUCED to me. I have known five men with beards in my life, and all five have played important parts in it. This one was almost M. Lishov's double, and even more repellent. He asked me whether I could make him a copy of Courbet's picture *La forêt aux biches* in the Louvre. It was a principle of mine never to say no: I wanted to get on. I was prompted to accept by the thought of working in the Louvre, copying a masterpiece, being paid into the bargain and doing something which would

please my father. I dashed to the Louvre to study Courbet's pictures, and bought a book which explained his methods of work.

My painter friend, who had already done several copies at the Louvre, gave me his advice. M. Minkevich, the copyist, introduced me to the man who had given him the commission, a Polish count who had ordered several copies for his new *château* somewhere near Warsaw. The count was much struck by my age, but rather looked as though he did not believe I could make a successful copy of Courbet. At the insistence, however, of M. Minkevich, who spoke of me in very complimentary terms and assured him with warmth and enthusiasm that I was full of talent, he agreed that I should work on it.

I was so delighted and proud that I allowed the copyist to make some advances to me – oh, only kissing my hand, as Poles like doing: the pressure of his damp fingers was repugnant to me. His black eyes, small and burning like coals, I found equally disagreeable; and so I did his pallid, Semitic nose, with its enormous, quivering nostrils. His mouth, thin and cruel, with no lips, looked like a streak across his face. He wore a moustache and a curled beard of medium size; his head was somewhat bald and his ears were very big. He was fairly tall and rather stooping. His hands were pale, the fingers muscular and knotty, the nails cut very short and unclean; the palms of his hands were always damp, and he continually wiped them with a spotless white handkerchief. He dressed quite elegantly, and gave the impression of being highly strung and in a hurry. His black eyes blinked unceasingly. There was always a small globule of saliva at the corners of his lips, which he licked smartly away with his very pointed tongue. His teeth were tiny and black with tobacco.

When my Montparnasse companions heard that he had selected me to work at the Louvre they all began telling me unpleasant things about him, so many that I wondered whether it was not jealousy that made them talk like that. They told me that he had an established reputation for paying his assistant copyists badly, when he paid them at all; that he was a terrible gambler and cheated at cards; that there were places where he did not dare to show his face, for fear of being thrown out for one reason or another; that when he was in a rage he was capable of acts of violence that had earned him punishment more than once . . . and so on. I listened to these tales, but they did not prevent my accepting the work I was offered. I thought I was quite capable, and I prepared a very big canvas for my copy. My studies were

completely successful, and my canvas was put in the Courbet room at the Louvre. I was too short to be able to reach the top, and I was furnished with a stool and a step-ladder. I must have been a striking sight, perched up like that! I was often surrounded by a crowd of inquisitive people watching me work, the ladies commenting:

"She's got more paint on her face than on her palette. . . ."

(And yet I never used make-up.)

"I say, look: she's wearing real flowers in her hat! Ask her if they are . . ."

And sometimes they did ask:

"Miss, are your flowers real or artificial?"

"Why, real, of course!"

Nothing could have been funnier than the expressions of these people from the provinces.

I soon got used to this idle chatter and paid not the slightest attention to it.

My employer used to come and stand near me to see whether the work was progressing. He was delighted with it and gazed at me approvingly. He would bring experienced copiers of pictures in the Louvre to assess my work; I heard them say that I had great facility, and I was offered some extremely interesting jobs. This made my employer literally slaver at the mouth and run and fetch me delicious sandwiches or fruit. Sometimes he even invited me to lunch, but I always refused: I preferred to lunch peacefully by myself in a little workman's restaurant for one franc twenty-five or one franc fifty. After that I would go back to work till four o'clock – as long as the light lasted; then someone would always come to take me for a walk: to see an exhibition or drink a cup of coffee. In the evenings I went to the Académie to work at my sketches. My days were so well filled that my conscience was at rest; I wrote to tell my father that I was being good and that everything was going well. He was pleased, and sent me fragrant parcels that smelt deliciously of Caucasian cheese, *halva* and dried raisins. I longed for a carpet, and he sent me a very lovely one from Tiflis.

In effect, I could very well have continued to lead such a steady life, and contented myself with being sensitive, romantic and natural; but it was precisely my nature, added to the fact that I lived surrounded by men, and artists at that, which made it more and more difficult for me to maintain my reserve for ever. I had no more desire to be an old

maid than to be a man. I was scared of marriage and of having children: the idea of being shackled to a young family frightened me, and I saw in it the loss of my cherished freedom and the cramping of my work, and with me my work counted for more than anything. None the less I could no longer stop myself learning what love was, as everybody finds out in the end. I was old enough, and everything in me, soul and body, was waiting with curiosity or impatience for a man who could give me confidence and make a woman of me: a happy woman, but no man's slave. And that was just where the difficulty lay: I should have to have faith in such a man, and in none of those by whom I was surrounded in those days – and God knows there were plenty of them – did I see "the man in my life".

Zadkine and L. were the people I saw most of. Otto L. used to come every day and take me either to the Louvre or the Académie. Zadkine was a delightful companion and very boyish. We walked about the streets and boulevards like two children, dazzled and rather in love, holding hands under the scented arches of the great flowering chestnut trees. He used to come to my place, and when neither of us had any money I would go and sell a load of empty bottles in order to buy some sausage and fried potatoes, and we ate bread and dripping, or the like, or drank tea.

My little room was simply furnished, but it was pleasant and intimate. There was a narrow sofa, two Caucasian carpets in warm colours, one hanging on the wall behind the sofa and the other on the floor, and cushions more or less everywhere. There was also a little Turkish table for the tea that was always ready, a work table, an ordinary chair, a big armchair that one could sleep in and some what-nots that held my books and my drawing paper. I had hung a looking-glass on one wall and my canvases on the others. On my work table there was a lamp with a shade which softened its glare. Some incense smouldered in a burner like my father's: it was heavily scented, but for me it was the smell of my beloved East. Another room served as my dressing room, and I kept canvases, frames and suitcases there.

No noise rose as high as my fourth-floor room, and sometimes the silence was such that I wondered whether there were really any human beings in the prison next door.

Zadkine liked laughing and joking, and also kissing me. He was as hot as a boiler that might blow up at any moment. We enjoyed teasing each other, and playing together like two animals, kissing and biting

each other savagely. I liked him very much: he was intelligent and interesting, but not easy to manage, for he had too strong a personality.

One evening he arrived in great excitement saying that at five o'clock in the morning criminals were to be executed in the Santé, reminding *me that from my room on the fourth floor we could watch the spectacle, horrible, it was true, but singular.* I shared his morbid curiosity, and we determined to stay awake till dawn. I poured out tea and we dined off some sandwiches. While we waited to watch the execution the time seemed to pass slowly and it was hard for us to stay awake till dawn. We lay down side by side on my narrow sofa and chattered, half asleep, of this and that. He liked being listened to; and I in my turn told him of the years I had spent at Tiflis while he was at Oxford, before he came to Paris. I understood then where he had acquired the directness of intellect and the manner of expressing himself which had astonished us all, even his English friends. His temerity, one might even call it arrogance, was known to everybody; the students said that he did not speak but yelled, or rather, barked like a dog, and it was true. He had his own dignity; but his Semitic pride sometimes wounded me, for I believed that my mother had been a converted Jewess.

One fine, mild evening when we were out for a walk we suddenly started arguing about art and about our work. Zadkine lost control of himself and was extremely rude to me; and I was revolted and smacked him soundly in the face, and he at once paid me back in the same coin. I was so infuriated that I spat in his face and ran away as fast as I could, horrified at what I had done; and he came tearing after me in a rage. I said to myself that he would certainly disfigure me, and thought "too bad". I was exhausted and I determined to stop and wait for him without stirring. He came up with his face red and sweating and his eyes glittering. "Think yourself lucky that you're called Maievnna," he bellowed, trembling with fury, "for if you were anyone else. . . ." and he showed me his fist, which was small but as hard as iron. Finally we burst out laughing and we never quarrelled again.

Sometimes we took the tram and escaped from Paris into the forest of Meudon, our favourite piece of country. There we liked to walk hand in hand, jabbering or breathing the balmy air of the splendid woods. We ran about like school children, trying to catch each other, and we were either in fits of laughter or fiercely kissing each other.

After these days of long walks and gaiety we went back to Paris with

our feet covered with bruises, but we were happy. I have always suspected that Zadkine picked up his passion for walking in England: "*le footing*" he called it. I caught that good habit from him, and I am proud of being able to walk several kilometres without getting tired.

Zadkine was really an ideal companion, and the memory of his friendship is always with me. What I liked most in him was his love of work, his perpetual need to create, and the enthusiasm with which he would inspire me to work, full of optimism for the future.

"I want to revive Jewish art," he would say.

I I

INSTEAD OF GOING HOME TO TITLIS I SPENT SOME WEEKS IN Brittany, at a time of spring-tides, with Otto, his friend Willi and Willi's wife, Olga Sakharov. I did not know Brittany, and I was dazzled by the landscape and the silvery light. Everything shone in the sun, from the slate of the roofs to the sea; only in Holland have I found the same richness of colour, the same quivering of trees and foliage, the same pale-blue sky. The countryside was bathed in damp, hazy air, of the purest transparence. I worked eagerly: we painted still-lives from fish of extraordinary size, each of us working in his own manner and to the limit of his capability. Personally I liked doing landscapes even better, for this allowed me to be alone and left me free to contemplate for hours the strange interplay of light and colour. I have always regretted not going back to Brittany, I found it so beautiful.

It was at Camaret that I first tasted hashish, which was becoming more and more the fashion at Montparnasse. We ate the paste in little pellets, or smoked it mixed with tobacco. The effects were unexpected, and everyone reacted in his own way; most of us, however, started off with a fearful desire to laugh. Your eyes became smaller and began to glitter strangely; your face turned pale, and twitched spasmodically. If the dose had been too strong you might have "the horrors", as in a nightmare; the laughter was followed by tears, and actions might be

completely uncontrolled. You rambled on about everything you saw – or thought you saw – and after the fit of weeping or raving you fell asleep. For my part I liked the drug because I discovered that I gained from it a frightening lucidity – so much so that one day I jumped through the window onto the roof of a house lower down, which seemed to me quite close. I had only wanted to go out of the room. Fortunately I escaped with a sore behind, and the roof with some broken slates. But the Bretons down below were very frightened: so was I, and that cooled my enthusiasm for hashish.

I liked the solemn processions at church festivals, and the betrothal days when the women, richly dressed in their short, pleated silk skirts, black velvet bodices, aprons edged with lace, and white caps that looked like sea-gulls, began dancing to the bagpipes. Skirts went flying and displayed legs sheathed in black stockings and feet in elegant, polished *sabots*. What a delight it was to watch their honest, childish joy.

And their funerals, so sad, so poignant: the women muffled in their black cloaks, and the men, all in black, walking slowly behind the coffin carried in the arms of the bearers – all this impressed me deeply.

At the Closerie des Lilas one evening, back in Paris, I met Ilya Ehrenburg, the Russian poet, and his wife Katya. Little by little we became linked by the bonds of friendship. At that time he was wearing his hair very long, falling on his shoulders in stiff, thoroughly greasy locks. The collar of his jacket was always covered with scurf. His appearance was slovenly and he looked like a nihilist as they are described in foreign novels; but his eyes, small and profound, looked whomever he was talking to straight in the face, and exerted a captivating charm. His words were ironical and mordant; women were suspicious of what he might say and preferred to be on good terms with him. He was cultured and intelligent. I believe his parents were German Jews; his name confirms this.

He was born at Kiev in 1891, and he had three sisters whom I knew in Paris after they left Russia. Ilya was the naughty child of the family, being spoilt, like all only sons, and as he grew older he became intolerable. He used to tell me of the nasty tricks he played on his sisters. I feel that if he had to live his childhood over again he would be quite capable of re-embarking on all those uncouth games that made the poor girls cry. He used to hide frogs and herrings in their clothes, tie their plaits to chairs when they were not looking and so on.

He had begun to write verse while still very young and to go in for politics with his college mates at Kiev. He was thrown into prison one day, I don't know exactly why, and the Russian police broke some of his front teeth. He never had those teeth mended, both because he did not care and also because he was afraid of dentists. This spoilt his mouth, with the very sensual lips which he drew to one side as he spoke.

He gave me one of his books of poems¹ to illustrate, and I was deeply moved by them. At one time he devoted himself exclusively to poetry; but during the 1914–18 war he became a reporter, and I am sure his stories were the best of their kind. His prose was remarkable too. It was at this time that he began writing short stories and novels. I have read several of them, and I particularly liked *Destin de l'Europe*, *Europe Société Anonyme*, *Julio Jurenito*, and *The Thirteen* as well as his latest book about Paris; but *Destin de l'Europe* astonishes me with its irony: on every page a people is described, with all its defects, and the accuracy, concision and clarity of the descriptions is typical of him. The book does not fail to frighten one either: some of his predictions have been realized, at least in part.

Ilya had both friends and enemies in Paris; but even the latter had to admit his talent and his lively intelligence. One day he was asked to go to the police station after being denounced by some sneak, one of the colony of Russian *émigrés*. Ehrenburg arrived, his everlasting pipe in his mouth, and the police officer, a decent fellow, talked to him very politely and showed him several of his books that he had on the table beside him, paying him the highest possible compliment for a writer or poet. Gorki also had a high opinion of Ehrenburg's talent.

I might just add that I last saw Ehrenburg in 1960, when he was in London. Seeing a friend again when so many years have passed – thirty-five or thirty-six, perhaps – is not so easy. Yet Ilya had not altered a great deal. The white hair framing his face made him look gentler, while his intelligent eyes focused on mine and his sceptical smile made me at once wish to contradict him. The hour we spent together went all too quickly. I wanted to ask him too many things, about his life, about his last meeting with Rivera and about Soviet Russia. The funny thing is that we talked a great deal of the time about dogs, which he has always loved.

In Paris a regular court of men and women had taken shape round

¹ Poems about the Eves.

him, and everyone who arrived from Russia or elsewhere abroad came to see him. During the war years he, Voloshin (the theosophical poet), Diego Rivera, the Mexican painter, and I were often seen together. Voloshin was a disciple of Verhaeren, the Belgian poet, and a great friend of the Russian poet Balmont; he was a man of great culture and refinement, and he was classical in his poetry to the same degree that Ehrenburg was realistic. I never knew what his real political opinions were: I only knew that he was most liberal in his views and as eager for others to enjoy liberty as to have it himself. It was a principle of his never to repay money he had succeeded in borrowing from someone who was rich, but to make a present of that sum to a friend who needed it. He had a great gift for drawing and painting and executed thousands of landscapes in water-colour. He was never tired of painting imaginary mountains and piles of crags disappearing from sight among fantastic clouds, plains running with rivers and bristling with forests, their roots and branches shaped like human beings.

During the couple of months I spent with him later at Biarritz, staying with some friends, I was absolutely mystified as I watched him in his room every day manufacturing one of those landscapes that one only sees in dreams.

"How do you do it?" I asked.

He looked at me through his spectacles, his little, grey eyes sparkling with mischief.

"You want me to tell you my secret?"

He confessed to me that every time he went to the lavatory he took some paper with him, and by crumpling the sheets he made miniature models of his astounding landscapes. Tissue paper creased in a particular way produced gentle, streamlined slopes, among which flecks of mist floated like feathers. These models called for marshes, brooks, stagnant water and low, swollen clouds; while if he took tough paper it came out as mountains surging up with steep, smooth, sharp-edged cliffs and terrifying precipices. The summits were covered with clouds, and somewhere there was a storm, though a ray of sunlight filtered through and lit up one corner of the sombre rock face and lent a kind of Dantesque mysteriousness to the landscape. In this way, he said, he wasted no time during his sessions in the lavatory: as a matter of fact he even spun them out.

Voloshin was short, compared with the volume of air he displaced. He was stout and broad, with a big head which looked bigger still

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thanks to his plentiful hair, which he wore long and waved. His eyes, shining with intelligence in the middle of his highly-coloured face, seemed smaller than they were. His nose was strong and straight, and his moustache hid a small mouth with lips pressed tight together; his teeth were small and perfect. A fine beard covered the lower part of his face, which was rounded and powerful. His head looked leonine, whereas Ehrenburg's reminded me rather of a great ape. Voloshin had short arms and, like Ilya, small hands; but Ilya's were so small and fragile as to look nearly feminine. When they were seen walking together down the rue de la Gaîté, one of the most crowded in Montparnasse, where people and children joked and played and made a great noise, everyone looked at them and said:

"I say: look at the two big monkeys!"

And if there were, in addition, Diego Rivera and myself between them, you could hear the street children shouting:

"Hi, boys! Here's the circus arrived! The two monkeys, the giant elephant and the Three Musketeers' girl!"

For Diego Rivera was a real colossus. Like Voloshin he wore a beard, but a shorter one, which fringed his chin in an oval, short and evenly trimmed. The most noticeable features in the face of the Mexican painter were the eyes, big, black and set aslant, and the nose, which from in front was short, broad, and thick at the tip, and in profile was aquiline. He had a wide mouth, and sensual lips like Ehrenburg's, but his teeth were white. A small moustache covered his upper lip and gave him the look of a Saracen or a Moor. His friends referred to him as the kindly cannibal". His hands were small for such a big body; his buttocks were wide and he had a corporation like Max Voloshin's. He had flat feet and a walk of his own. To complete the picture he wore a wide-brimmed hat and carried an enormous Mexican walking-stick, which he was apt to brandish.

Such were three of my friends at that time. The fourth was more conventional and seldom let himself be seen with us in the street; he did not like being laughed at, and found the three others and myself a bit too eccentric for his taste. This man, Boris Savinkov, another legendary figure, played a notable part in his time. He was well known in Russia and his fame spread to Paris. He was introduced in drawing rooms as "the man who assassinated the Grand Duke Michael", and society women were thrilled and ran after him. I was much surprised at this when I saw it myself. We were very fond of him, and if he and

Ehrenburg did often quarrel about politics they had a great regard for each other.

Boris Savinkov was of average height, upright and slender: his face was long and narrow and his head half bald. He had faint creases round his eyes, which sloped up towards his temples, like those of our Kazan Tatars. He had a straight nose and long, thin lips. When he talked his eyes creased up even more, leaving his searching, ironical gaze just room to find its way between his almost lashless eyelids. He twisted his mouth slightly when letting the words out, showing the yellowed teeth of a great smoker. He wore neither moustache nor beard, dressed very correctly and always wore a black bowler hat. At the Rotonde and everywhere else he was called "the man in the bowler". A big umbrella, another inseparable companion, was always to be seen hanging from his left arm.

One day, when I had taken my four friends to see Zadkine at his new studio, which was crammed with remarkable pictures of his, Savinkov declared that he thought the man himself was less interesting than his work.

"He's a buffoon, your Zadkine. Why does he act the clown?" Zadkine thought Savinkov very interesting as a personality, but:

"Why does he make himself out so important today, when everything's finished for him in Russia?"

I do not recall the details of the conversations on art we had at the S.s', but I remember perfectly that Savinkov, who held very advanced political views, was rather conservative in matters of aesthetics, and preferred classical art to modern. I met him through Voloshin, who admired him greatly and said to me that day:

"Marevna, I want to introduce a legendary hero to you. I know you have a zest for the extraordinary and for real supermen. This man is an exemplification of every beauty: you will be passionately fond of him."

At first I did not like him at all, but one could not help noticing him because of his manner and his way of speaking. I saw him again afterwards at the Rotonde and at the S.s', several times at his own place and three or four times at my studio, where he came to read to me from the volume of his collected work called *The Pale Horse*.

He gave me the impression of being solitary, withdrawn and proud. (I myself have never been interested in the politics of my friends, but only in their intellectual and artistic lives. I have never allowed myself to be caged by any party. To give oneself up to politics one must

devote one's whole time to it: mine is all needed for painting and for the struggle to live. In 1919, when I had a child to bring up, I gave up all my time to a work which demanded much sacrifice; and my child demanded more. . . .)

I 2

THANKS TO KNOWING ALL THESE MEN IN PARIS AND AT CAPRI my personality developed, I grew up and matured, my critical faculty became more acute and my personal standpoint took shape.

At the time of my comradeship with Voloshin, Rivera, Ehrenburg and Savinkov, my father was already dead. I heard of his death on 14 January, 1914, when I found, on coming home very late one evening, a telegram slipped under the door. I was so tired after working all day at the Louvre at my copy and spending the evening with friends that I could not be bothered to open it. Why, I said to myself, why does one always rush at a telegram the moment one gets home and sees there is a bit of blue paper with the *concierge* or in the letter box or, as on this evening, under the door? I had had a headache all the evening and felt strangely heavy and glum. My friends had left me and I had come back alone by the last Métro train, as if drawn towards the house. . . . My head ached and I felt sick. . . . Next morning, as soon as I woke up, I made haste to open the telegram: "Father dead. Friendly greetings. Golovashkin."

At the very first I could not understand what father was meant. . . . My father could not treat me like that – die so suddenly, leave me all alone in this jungle of life without warning me, without a word. I had to read the cold phrase again and again in order to understand gradually that it was true. No: it could not be a practical joke that someone was playing on me: my father *was* dead, far away, so hopeless, so weary, that he had been unable to hold fast to this everyday life and wait until the day set for our meeting. What had happened? What had been the cause, the occasion of his death? What hopeless sickness had he died of? Gradually, with my certainty, came the tears. Then shivers

overran my body, and at last my whole being shuddered. I stayed in the darkness, half naked, defeated, destroyed by the sharpness of my grief.

What was I to do? Perhaps if I had had any money I should have set off at once. If I had tried to borrow the money necessary for the journey I should doubtless have found it; but my sorrow deprived me of any desire to act. Now that Father was no more, of what use to struggle and to live? What could I do at Tiflis, alone, poor, faced by people who would be banded against me?

Another telegram came, from my uncle Anton: "Stay in Paris. Your presence Tiflis unnecessary. Please not trouble grandmother." Some days later a letter came from him, a strange one in which he declared that it was because of me that Father had committed suicide, and that I was a heartless and unscrupulous girl. "I found your letters among his papers," he wrote. "They reveal your lack of gratitude and affection. You were unable to love your father, who did so much for you, who lived for you alone. . . ." They were hard words. He enclosed a list of all that was left after my father's death: if I wanted to be entitled to it I should have to pay the legacy duty.

I understood none of this. I remained convinced that it was illness which had impelled my father to perform an act which I had dreaded and foreseen. But what were the circumstances? Weighed down by some moral burden? Struck down by a bodily decline? In consequence, perhaps, of the menacing clouds that darkened the skies of politics? I have never been able to find out: I still do not know. Perhaps all these causes were in league to crush my father at one blow: and I was far away; he had nothing to cling to. Exhaustion, bad health and loneliness doubtless took advantage of a moment of depression to ravage him fatally.

Before he died my father had sent me my monthly allowance, some cheese, dried fruit, picture postcards of the Caucasus – and his magnificent, white tussore-silk cap which I had so coveted – and a fine carpet.

For two days I shed so many tears that I could see nothing, and lost my voice from weeping and sobbing. Of course I neglected my copying in the Louvre: I forgot everything, everything. I stayed in bed without food, without purpose, without the courage to act. I thought that since my father was dead I should die too. I was indifferent to everything.

One morning on the stroke of eight I was roused from my nightmare

sleep by loud crashes on my door. Someone was not only knocking but shaking it violently. I went towards it, and from the voice which growled at me to open it at once I recognized Minkevich. He had come to make a scene, to accuse me of stealing his money (he had given me an advance on my copying), of being unwilling to do any more work, out of laziness because of my drunkenness and my "sleeping around". All this through the door. I whispered to him in my ruined voice to have patience for one minute – time for me to dress and let him in; but he probably distinguished nothing because of my hoarseness and, in a towering rage, he broke the lock with a blow from his shoulder.

I was in my nightgown, and was shocked at having someone forcing his way in like this. He continued his fulminations, searching the studio with his eyes, looking for a supposed lover. There was an umbrella standing against the wall by the door: I seized it and struck him several hearty blows on the skull, being unable to say a word or to call for someone; not only was my studio too far from the *concierge's* lodge, but once again my throat could not produce the smallest sound.

The madman did not fail to retort to my whacks with the umbrella: he tore my weapon from me and it was my turn to receive a good beating – so good that the umbrella broke and I fell to the floor; seeing which the lunatic threw away the pieces and fled.

I do not know how I managed to dress: I arrived at the Rotonde in a fine state. I was so disfigured by tears and blows that my friends could hardly recognize me. I told them that I had lost my father, and I described the crazy episode with the Pole: they could see the traces of the blows and of my despair. Ehrenburg's wife took me to her room at a hotel to comfort me. As I left the Rotonde my friends arranged to meet me there in two days' time, saying that I should see the Pole chastized.

On the evening arranged I went to the Rotonde. There were several good friends there, all foreigners; one of them, who knew about my misfortune, proposed marriage. I was twenty-two: my father's family, all ardent Catholics, had officially disowned me; I knew nobody in the world. But I continued to have no intention of marrying. My conscience reproached me with not having kept, in Paris, to a high standard of conduct; I told myself that perhaps my father had heard of it – whether Minkevich had written him anonymous letters (which he was quite capable of doing) or my uncle Anton had taken it upon himself to warn him (my uncle had agents in Paris for his steam central-heating apparatus).

That evening I saw round me only the faces of well-wishers and sympathizers. The café was crammed with people. I sat in a corner where I remained with Ehrenburg and his wife. At eleven o'clock Minkevich made his appearance and went and sat at a chess table, as was his custom (though he had made an exception to this ritual on the two days that followed our umbrella-fight). At once several faces turned towards me and winked in complicity.

At half-past eleven L., who had come back from Switzerland the day before and had heard of my trouble, went up to the table where they were playing chess and asked Minkevich to let him have five minutes' conversation – "in the street," he specified.

"No, here," the Pole answered laconically, turning pale.

"There are too many people; one can't hear oneself speak. Are you afraid to come outside?" L. enquired.

"Afraid? Me? What for? I've done nothing wrong. My conscience is clear."

"We shall see," said the Englishman, pushing him courteously but firmly towards the door which opened on to the boulevard Montparnasse.

Meanwhile more than half the customers, as though moved by a single spring, got up hastily, and all eyes were directed at our man who had turned from white to greenish.

"What do you want with me? Do I know Mlle Stebelka? No, I don't. Marevna? Yes, I know Marevna, if that's who you mean. But nothing serious happened, I give you my word. No, I didn't hit her. . . . I didn't know her father was dead. . . ."

Faced with a brute like this who persisted in denying that he had done anything to me L. lost his boxer's coolness and gave the Pole a hook to the chin, which was immediately followed by a punch in the eye. It was like a signal: at once there was a rush and they all leaped at him, each getting in his blow, slapping, punching and even kicking him in the stern.

The brawl was at its height when I heard a pistol shot, police whistles, and cries of anger and pain, mixed with the ejaculations of the crowd. Someone took me by the hand to show me the lout: he lay on the ground, a fearful sight, covered with blood, his eyes closed, his mouth swollen and his nose a pulp.

"There, you scum, see what that beating has cost you! Take a good look at her. Open your eyes, you swine, and look! To think she was

still quite ready to be sorry for you. It was enough for you to know that you'd nothing more to fear from her father. . . . Yes, officer, he's a dirty devil, a swine: and he wanted to shoot at us into the bargain. Fortunately, it went off into the air. . . ."

A painter named Lipchinsky was explaining, a man with a heart of gold; for it was the sound of the shot that had brought the policemen running. They loaded the deflated madman into a taxi and took him to the police station. The mob of watchers dispersed, and the rest returned to the Rotonde, laughing now, and crowding round me to vouch for the sincerity of their comradeship.

M. Leblanc was very much upset by the unfairness of this fight: fifteen or twenty against one! He came up to me and asked whether I was really so malicious that I could watch such slaughter unconcerned! I remained silent: I was incapable of uttering a word. Ehrenburg answered for me:

"Three days ago Marevna heard that she had lost her father; and that brute behaved to her as if he was the foulest swine, breaking open her door, insulting her and beating her. What's more, he still owes her money. What do you think of a creature like that? There was nothing to do except punish him."

Leblanc knew nothing at all about the business. When he heard what had happened he declared that if the fellow ever set foot in his place again, when he came out of prison, he would chuck him out.

After this there were police statements, and official enquiries at the café; and finally the copyist was entered in the visitors' book at the Santé for carrying a prohibited weapon.

13

AS FOR ME, I FELL SERIOUSLY ILL: THERE COULD BE NO explanation of this but that it was my soul that was sick. I think I had lost the taste for living. I felt alone and wretched after the shocking end of the father I adored. Besides, Golovashkin had written me a letter from which I understood that I was being regularly plundered.

He began by asking for my signature to a list he enclosed which he said was an inventory of jewels and gold and silver, objects which had been kept put away in my father's office. All these things were my property, presents that Father had given me each year for my birthday; but obviously Yelena Kirillovna was putting in for them herself and trying to do me out of them. She claimed that the valuables were hers and that she had asked my father's permission one day to deposit them with him, to preserve them from the danger of a possible seizure. Her husband wrote of my father as of a poor man, a distant relation whom he hardly knew.

He told me plainly in his letter that shortly before his death my father had shown clear symptoms of acute neurasthenia; that his health had declined; that there had been many changes in ministries and posts after the arrival of a new viceroy. One day, when he came home for dinner, Yelena Kirillovna had asked him whether he preferred his chicken roasted or casseroled. He answered her, and she left him alone in his room. Some moments later there had been a loud noise, but no one had paid any attention; it was only when someone had gone to look for him, to ask him to go in to dinner, and when he had not answered, that the door of his bedroom had been opened. A strong smell of gunpowder had escaped. Someone had gone in and seen (Who had gone in? Who had been the first to see him?) Bronislav Vikentievich lying on his bed under the two icons of Christ. He no longer had a face or a head. All that was left was his tobacco-stained moustache caught on the pillow. Apart from the moustache there was nothing but a horrid mask. Poor Papa! He had had the courage to put his best rifle firmly together and, pressing the trigger with his foot, to fire a bullet into his mouth. He had died instantaneously.

Today I can think of my father calmly and tenderly; but I still regret, at this very moment, not having been able to go to him in time. Perhaps he would have been able to die peacefully of old age, and thus follow the example of his own father, my grandfather.

The last monthly allowance Father sent me from Tiflis was soon spent. Uncle Anton did promise, however, to send me a little money for a period. This money, by the way, came from my father's life-insurance: it was to be shared among all the members of the Stebelski family: it was my grandmother who had let me have her share, in memory of Bronek, her favourite. It would bring in a few dozen francs a month, and would last for about a year. Besides this, the French

government had decided to come to the help, while the war lasted, of deserving foreign artists as well as French ones, and for two years I benefited from this aid, in money, free meals, artists' canteens and allowances of coal. So I managed to exist honestly. Will, perseverance and love of my work did the rest and helped me not to founder.

Some friends, moreover, two months after my father's death, organized a charity ball for my benefit, since my state of health was very poor. The money made at this affair was enough for me to go to Italy, where I spent eight months recuperating, and only came back to Paris when France had entered the war. . . .

I remember the ball very clearly. It was held in a big café in the avenue du Maine. I had been implored not to go, for I was coughing fearfully; but my low spirits, the solitude of my studio at Montrouge, and the persistent dejection produced by my sense of guilt for my father's death were too strong. I lit a candle, undressed, carefully smeared my face with ochre mixed with black, and did the same to my neck, chest and arms. By means of a towel tightly bound I flattened my breast. I put on a nightgown and over that a sheet folded in two and cut in the middle for about a foot from the bottom, then sewn and gathered with strong thread and bound round my ankles. Then I stained my feet brown and slipped on some sandals. I wound round my waist a broad red scarf which held up my baggy trousers. A Caucasian knife put the final touch to my piratical appearance. I pulled my fair curls together on the top of my skull, took my salad-basket and put it on upside down, and wound a strip torn from a sheet round the whole thing to look like a turban. I wore two curtain rings as ear-rings. When I had altered my face by putting black round my eyes and rouge on my lips, I did not recognize myself in the looking glass. Nothing, absolutely nothing, was left of the Marevna of the Russian folk-tale. And how magnificently well, for once, my boy's hands went with this rig. I was sure no one would know me. Above all I must not speak, nor laugh: well, since my father's death and the row with the Pole I could only whisper and was hardly able to make myself understood. For fear of being seen dressed like this in my part of the town I put on a dressing-gown, a present from Mme Gorki, which was a long, full, red and green kimono lined with red, that went perfectly with my costume.

I set off with a determined, masculine gait, entering resolutely into the skin of my part. It was past midnight and I had to walk quickly on

the way to the avenue du Maine; not that it was far, but the district was unsafe and had a bad reputation. However, in my man's dress I was less frightened. Twenty minutes later I arrived at the door of the café where the people coming to the ball were gathering.

"Hullo, a blackamoor! Ali Baba! What's your name? . . . Astonishing, that chap: who can it be?"

They were intrigued and stared after me. All the artists in fancy dress, and there were some of every nationality, had already taken off their masks, and I could recognize them.

I enjoyed myself. I made up to the women: without saying a word I kissed their hands, stroked their shoulders, made signs to show how much I admired their hair, and pretended to be much smitten. I put on a real act. I blustered with the men, jostled them, and drew my *kinzhal*, pretending to be ready to rip my adversary up – all this quite silently, without uttering a word or giving a hint of a smile, which at times was not at all easy. Zadkine attached himself to me with two women.

"We must undress him," said these two, "and take his turban off."

I adopted a threatening air.

They wanted to touch my breasts, but on that side I was securely barricaded. To give evidence of my real masculinity I kept showing my hands, and making them feel my muscles. I went so far as to make the inquisitive ones feel a banana I had concealed about my person. There was really nothing in my get-up that they could find fault with. Zadkine looked me squarely in the eye and I returned his gaze unyieldingly. He said that there was something about me which gave him the impression that he had seen me somewhere before; but he was the only person who had this impression: the others suspected nothing. Besides, I got away as quickly as possible from people I knew too well.

None the less I was very much exhausted and depressed. My first pleasure in the surprise had passed, and I sank into a corner. I had no money and I could not stand myself a drink, and I was too proud to accept the offer of one.

At last people began to disperse, and I followed a group who were going to the Rotonde to drink the inevitable *café-crème* and eat hot *croissants*.

Sitting there with Ehrenburg, his wife, Zadkine and the others, I decided to ask where Marevna was.

"Poor girl, she's stayed at home. It was idiotic, come to think of it,

not to ask her to come. The ball was for her. Why hide it from her?"

"It's very nice of you, anyhow," I said then. "Thank you. You see I'm among you all the same!"

It was a real surprise, and everyone laughed at the story of the banana and of my successes with the women.

"You are hiding your real gifts, you know, Marevna," said Ehrenburg. "Considering what life really is, you remind me rather of a fallen angel, or a raging madman, or a badly trained tigress. Today you displayed yourself to us as a well-camouflaged devil!"

They continued to laugh, and drank my health.

My friends warmed themselves with coffee and I ate some *croissants*. The sun was just rising when I set off walking home in the direction of Montrouge. The street-sweepers were beginning the morning toilet of the boulevards: groups of workmen were hurrying to catch the first Métro, while others were cycling out to the suburbs. My dress made them laugh, and they passed remarks as they went by, some funny, some indecent. The coolness of the morning, full of pleasant smells, made me shiver, and I also shivered when I thought of my approaching departure. I was both pleased and sad to be leaving Paris – Paris which had astonished me and at times had also treated me so cruelly.

Some days later I got rid of my studio at Montrouge and paid all my debts. My friends took it upon themselves to buy me a supply of canvases, paper, paints and brushes, and they took me to the station for the Genoa line. L. was to join me in Italy with his former beloved, at Portofino, a pleasant, quiet little place. I got my strength back there, both morally and physically, working and at the same time recovering from the disturbances of life in Paris, and I drove with Italian friends to visit Genoa, Florence, Pisa, Venice, Siena and Ravenna.

I enjoyed the times in Italy when I could yield myself to nature and to the artistic treasures of the country; but the human beings I met were far from being as striking as those I had known at Capri, except for a splendid Venetian, Dario, who shared with his mother and brother the ownership of a big hotel at Portofino, the *Splendid*.

This second stay in Italy, then, was very different from the first. I could, however, get to know the country better, and I was grateful to Dario and his mother for their friendliness to me and for the way they spoilt a poor orphan. In the same way the owner of the little hotel at Portofino, where I was staying, and his wife, were very fond of me and cherished me: I was charged only two and a half *lire* for my board and

lodging, simply because I had lost my father and was ill. I was forbidden to smoke more than two cigarettes a day, but I was sometimes given Chianti or Asti spumante to drink: the proprietor said that it was *strengthening*.

I was sorry to leave Italy, but no more money was arriving for me from France; I did not know how to earn my living and I did not wish to be kept: I wanted to go on working in Paris.

I 4

WHEN I GOT OUT OF THE TRAIN IN PARIS IN 1917 THE FIRST thing I had to do was to go to the Rotonde and see M. Leblanc and my friends about finding a studio. The town was gloomy: October in Paris is often very pleasant, but the streets had become emptier. At the café I found that several of my friends had enlisted or were about to go.

At a time when Russia had withdrawn from the conflict and had abandoned her allies in order to launch her revolution, it was not at all pleasant to be a Russian. The *concierges*, particularly, persecuted their Slavonic tenants, and urged them to enlist as volunteers: "Otherwise, out!"

"Those dirty Russians!" one heard. "Traitors! Spies! All the Russians in Paris ought to be sent packing, have a kick on their behinds, not to be given anything to guzzle . . ." etc.

I myself got involved in a skirmish on this account in the rue Vavin. I had just come out one morning from my studio in the rue Asseline, with my album under my arm, to go to the Académie. I was wearing a big white cape and a wide hat. A splendid girl from the Halles was coming towards me, one of those who went about the streets selling fruit and vegetables, in her short, pleated skirt, black stockings and smart *sabots* with high heels. She had a vivid, ruddy complexion, and her low-necked blouse revealed a delicate, pink skin. She was humming as she pushed along her barrow of vegetables, and there was something dazzling about her. Anyone who saw her would have stopped to admire, and I did so until she was quite close to me.

"Well, d'you want my photo? Can't you stop staring at me? It's a bit thick: you think I'm frightened of you? What've I got that's so funny? Don't know, eh? Well, I'll tell you what I've got: I've got a brother at the war, and I work, I do, you whore! Codfish! I bet you're a foreigner!"

"Well, I am, aren't I?" I said to myself. "No use denying it."

"Yes," I answered.

"What country are you from?"

I could have said Italy or America, but I did not care to lie.

"What did I say? Another of those dirty Russians eating our children's bread!"

Letting go her barrow she came up to me. (We were already surrounded by several dozen people.) She shouted into my face and my silence and reserve provoked her more than anything I might have said. When I tried to push her aside and escape, she seized me by the shoulders, wrnched at my cape and snatched off my fine hat. I thought she was going to tear me to pieces. She kept on calling to the crowd, trying to incite them against me:

"We know the Russians now: trash! Funks! Traitors! What are we waiting for? Why don't we take all of them that are still in Paris and break their backs?"

Whereupon she gave me a furious clout on one cheek and then on the other. My head hit the wall behind me and I think I lost consciousness.

A policeman came along, took me by the arm, picked up my album and said: "Don't take it to heart, mademoiselle. She is dru'" : I know her well. Shut up, you! If all the women were like you and talked like that, that'd be a fine thing. Off with you!"

The woman went on screaming and gesticulating, but the loiterers were already leaving her by herself and going away. I saw the policeman leading her along by the arm.

A lady walked up and sympathized with me:

"This war! It makes people cross and wicked. It's true the Russians have deserted us, but you had nothing to do with that. An artist's life must be very hard nowadays. Now, you must go home to bathe your face a bit, and then forget all this. Fortunately there are still some decent French people who don't talk like that fool. And of course she had been drinking. Be brave, now!"

I stopped at a *cr  merie* where I could relieve myself by crying. My

whole face was burning, and one of my lips was split. I told the woman who ran the place what had happened. (She was a splendid person: as soon as I stopped getting the few roubles from Russia, and I was faced with a tragic situation, she offered to let me have my meals on credit until times improved.) She soothed me, gave me a cup of coffee and did not know how to apologize for her fellow-countrywoman who had behaved so senselessly – she was such a splendid person, as I say, that one day when she heard that I needed a bandage that I could not afford she lent me the necessary money. I made her a present of a picture, a still life; but she was not interested in cubism.

One consequence of this adventure in the street was that I no longer dared to look at anyone. In a crowd, when I heard people – women, chiefly – running down the Russians, I made haste to be off, much though I longed to ask them whether they would not have done the same if revolution had broken out in France; but I realized also what a difference there was between France and Russia, and I hoped that one day Russians would enjoy the same liberty as Frenchmen did. When I spoke of my little scene to my friends at the Rotohnde, who were mostly foreigners, those among them who were Russians decided to leave Paris for the Côte d'Azur. Ehrenburg and his wife and another journalist went to Nice, where Boris Savinkov joined them later. A Russian sculptor who was already talked of, Archipenko, also left Paris and sought asylum in the land of the sun. I stayed in Paris: I had not the train fare, and I should have lost the benefit of the canteen and of the *crémérie* where I could eat for nothing.

15

IT WAS AT THIS TIME THAT MAX VOLOSHIN INVITED ME TO STAY with him for several weeks at Biarritz, in a big villa by the seaside. His friend S., a Russian millionaire, and his wife, who were greatly esteemed in Paris, often invited artists to dinner or for an *apéritif*; but these were no commonplace parties: they were works of art, dinners where the food was as carefully chosen as the guests, who were painters,

sculptors, writers and poets. There were very few women. Madame S. was a woman of great culture; she had completed her studies in Germany and was a doctor of philosophy. Her first husband had been a man who was well known in the revolutionary movement and something of a writer, and they had had one daughter. Then there had been a divorce and, from being a simple, shy student she had become the beautiful Madame S., a society figure known in all the *salons* and who had gone so far as to give herself the pleasure of having an artistic *salon* of her own and to play the part of a Maecenas. Voloshin promised to introduce her to me – or rather me to her – on my return from Biarritz.

At Biarritz I saw Voloshin at work, writing articles and poems, and painting one or two water-colours every day. He was very affectionate to me, and perhaps he also felt greatly attracted: I thought I could recognize the signs. Ehrenburg and Boris Savinkov teased me incessantly about my great bear, but I pretended to notice nothing. It was a delightful comradeship that drew us together at Biarritz, and I much enjoyed the hours I spent listening to him talking, until I was overtaken by sleep. Our conversations revolved round art, the world, the soul, God; they began at home and continued on our walks or at the café. He was a man who was at once learned, cultivated and amusing; it was a treat to be living under his wing. Unfortunately my nature was very wayward, a regular hotchpotch, in fact one minute I would be as shy as a small girl, the next I would have played the rowdy before God himself, if I had had the chance. . . . I had had enough of Biarritz, too, and of the monotony of our days there. Perhaps, if I had loved Max, I might have profited more from that remarkable man. . . . Anyhow, since an organization of Russian artists in Moscow had managed to send a little money to the Russian artists in Paris, thanks to Voloshin I had my share.

"Since you don't know Spain," he said, "take the train and off you go. I'll see to it that all your papers are in order. I know everyone here."

In fact after a few days everything was arranged; I kissed my bear and set off.

I went to Perpignan, Bayonne, Fuenterrabia and the three Pasajes. I idled about, taking the blues with me but breathing fresh air; and I was free – too free, perhaps: I did not want to become attached to anyone. I was once more engaged in a struggle with myself, torn be-

tween the inclinations of my senses and my desire to remain at liberty. I stayed several days at Pasajes St Jean. One would have said that I was the only woman on earth among the men working in the fields or on the railway. I watched them drinking and playing cards or billiards, but my thoughts were far away. I did not lay hand to pencil or paper: I could not compel myself to work.

One day the manager of the hotel said to me:

"You're wasting your time here, *señorita*: there are only farm labourers and fishermen – not much in your line. Why don't you go to San Sebastian? You'd find rich people there: they'd spoil you and you'd have lots of *pesetas*."

"How?"

"Oh, dancing or singing, to be sure. It's easily seen you're an artist."

I answered that I was a painter and that rich people bored me: and he at once felt friendly towards me. He took me with his wife to a bullfight in a small village, where I could watch the people enjoying themselves in freedom, singing, dancing and laughing till late at night. We came home in a little cart. He gave me long Spanish cigars, and I drank sherry and malaga, heavy and red as blood.

After that I went to San Sebastian to see a grand bullfight that was being given in the presence of Alfonso XIII. It was a splendid show: twelve horses and six bulls: and the way it was staged! But what an exhausting spectacle: several times over I wished the man would be killed. It was too unfair: the bull was alone, surrounded by enemies; and his end, his destruction, was preordained: he must not come out of the arena alive. His courage, his skill, counted for nothing beside those of the resplendent man dressed in gold, velvet and silk, who seemed almost to dance round the bull, leaping, pirouetting, laughing at the horns, making game of them and of death; but for years he had trained himself to kill, to perfect himself in the art of killing. Intelligent and cunning the bull might be (by instinct, not from study), but invariably death awaited him. I saw the horses staggering on their feet, wounded and with their entrails hanging out of the wound, dragging themselves along and spreading a stench that made me feel faint, when men made haste to drag these half-corpses into the wings, stuffing the entrails back into their bellies with straw, sewing it all up and leading the tormented animals back before the panting audience. And at the climax men and women uttered howls of joy.

I left the arena, divided between the horror and the splendour of

the spectacle. Since then, however, I have never found the courage to go again and see the bulls and horses die.

The day came when I had to go back to Biarritz. I had no more money, and, besides, I began to miss Paris. Paris meant work, and the two or three friends I felt the lack of in that paradise. So one evening, without warning, I climbed the wall round the villa Les Mouettes at Biarritz, got into Max's room through the window and hid under the bed with my suitcase. It seemed a long wait, and I lit one of those famous long Spanish cigars given me by the manager of the hotel at Pasajes. After about half an hour I heard Voloshin's step: the door opened and he sniffed loudly. It should be said that Voloshin never smoked: he was asthmatic and loathed the smell of tobacco.

"The devil must be in the room, scattering his filthy, burning sulphur about. Out of here, devil! Out of here, or I'll fetch some hot water and a broom."

He came further into the room, and he must have looked all round him: it was not hard to see the cigar smoke coming from under the bed.

"Marevna! You're stinking up my bed and I shan't be able to sleep. Come out from under there and tell me the whole story."

I put my head out and burst out laughing at the sight of Voloshin, quite scarlet, very happy to see me again but half suffocated by the tobacco.

"I hope you're not dragging a whole tobacconist's about with you," he chaffed me, as he saw me come out on all fours, pulling my suitcase after me.

My fortnight's absence had smoothed away our last disputes, disagreements and wrangles – for he had not an accommodating nature, either: he was suspicious, and loved teasing.

I told him my adventures and how I had lived. . . .

"And there was I hoping against hope that a Spaniard would find the way to hold onto you somewhere. But I knew very well that with your wicked disposition that was impossible. Who would want to keep a little witch like you?"

Voloshin told me that a priest had arrived, a refugee from Belgium, full of terrifying stories about the war, and that other refugees were expected in the town.

Finally I told him of my decision to go back to Paris in order to work: where I was, my work was not progressing at all, I said.

"Stay a bit longer," he answered. "Nobody's forcing you to go, and you're with me."

But I could not stay still and at last, one afternoon, Max took me to the station.

"What an odd girl you are, really," he said. "Here you are, living in the lap of luxury. You have every comfort, a fine bathroom, a splendid library at hand, everything, including a devoted friend. And you must run away as fast as your legs will carry you, as if you had someone after you."

"Perhaps that's what it really is," I replied.

"And who is after you? Not I, anyhow. You can be easy as far as I am concerned. So long as you don't want me I shan't come a step towards you. You know me, and you know how fond of you I am; but I shall never come running after you. Rather distrust the others if you're so keen on keeping your blessed freedom. Write and let me know what you need when you're in Paris: don't be without money. As soon as I come back I'll see about helping you in your work. . . ."

We kissed each other: it was a very good friend I was taking leave of, a friend who had often cradled me in his arms, with whom I had behaved as though I had been his daughter, but who was also in love with me, as I knew.

He was the most honest, dependable man that I had known since Yura and Kay; and to speak for him he had his profound intelligence, his breadth of culture and his lively wit.

16

AS SOON AS I GOT TO PARIS I WENT TO MY STUDIO IN THE RUE Asseline. There was a big mail waiting for me: invitations to exhibitions and varnishing-days, and a word from Boris Savinkov to say he had a client who was prepared to buy a picture from me. That same evening I looked in at the Rotonde, where I found all my friends, It was time to think of work from every aspect, including that of bread and butter; and there was no better way of fixing myself up than to

resort to my friends. Ehrenburg asked me to make a binding for one of his books of Russian poems, which I should be paid for. Other comrades gave me the addresses of people – doctors, mostly – who were amateurs of painting.

Besides this there was an organization, the A.A.A. – “Aide aux Artistes” – the president of which was Gustave Kahn, of the newspaper *Le Quotidien*, and the vice-president Zamaron, who had an appointment at the Prefecture of Police. They told me he was very kind and never refused to help an artist, and that one could count on him at the beginning of every month, but must not think of him again after that. . . . He was also very fond of bridge and poker (and he was inclined to lose!). One day, then, I took my courage in both hands and, carrying some canvases and water-colours, I made my way timidly to his office at the Prefecture of Police; but in the vestibule, as I waited outside his door, I came upon several painters who had got there before me, poor Russian Jews, mostly, like Krémègne, who was very gifted and later on was to make a name for himself. I must say that Zamaron did not lack flair: he used to buy canvases from Modigliani, Soutine and Utrillo for fifty francs apiece.

Krémègne cheered me up: he was a very good chap, rather too shy, small and awkward, but endowed with an excellent heart. As he came out of Zamaron's office he gave me a wink: it was working! The next thing was that the door-keeper asked the purpose of my visit.

“About some pictures,” I answered.

“Very good.”

He went in and I heard him announce to Zamaron:

“It's a young lady with some pictures.”

“Show her in.”

That is how I entered Zamaron's office for the first time.

Eventually the beginning of every month saw me turning up there faithfully with one or two pictures. If he could buy nothing himself he would give me some addresses. “Very dependable ones . . . say you come from me. . . .” And in the end I always found myself with a little money in my pocket.

And more than this, friends of my friends introduced me to friends of theirs; Gustave Kahn also bought pictures from me, and Voloshin knew an immense number of people in Paris, even if only among the Russian colony. In short, I was keeping the wolf from the door fairly successfully.

One evening Voloshin took me to see M. and Mme S. The guests were usually all men, and Mme S. sat enthroned among them, beautiful, tall, majestic. She liked to do the guiding of the conversation, which always revolved round artistic and political questions; and Boris Savinkov whispered to me, puckering his slits of eyes: "What a pity that such a pretty woman should open her mouth! It would be hard to be stupider even when covered by a Ph.D. . . ." I also thought she was too talkative. She wanted to put herself forward, cost what it might, as a connoisseur of art, especially of modern art. Before we went in Voloshin had said to me: "Don't be too naughty. I shall do all that I can to see that Mme S. buys a picture or two from you – and her mother too. Only you must smile: show your teeth merrily and don't scowl."

Mme S. looked me up and down, and thought I was too young and "nice": apparently I reminded her of a *gimnazistka* (high-school girl). She manifested some surprise when she saw that all the men liked me, including her favourites. People like me felt rather out of our element in her sumptuous rooms covered with splendid carpets and graced with valuable tables. We were used to the Rotonde; and we behaved as though we were still in the café. Ehrenburg, with his dirty shoes and long hair, knocked out his pipe no matter where, and when I looked at him he called to me loudly.

"Now, Marevna tsarevna, what are you looking at me like that for? Don't I look a perfect picture, seated in this armchair covered in red silk?"

I laughed and did not answer. . . .

Voloshin was polite and attentive to Mme S., but watched me from a distance with his little bear's eyes, and sometimes came up to ask whether I was not being too bored. Rivera was quite at home, sitting jauntily at the table, chewing slowly and delivering long, very interesting discourses on painting and politics. Voloshin supplied him with vigorous rejoinders. Savinkov was reserved and listened to the others talking with an ironical expression which from time to time betrayed his amusement.

How I loved those evenings round the great table, when I listened to these soul-stirring beings, each asserting his own personality. It was a pose when Savinkov said that he was fed to the teeth in "the ridiculous *salon* of the buxom, lion-hunting Mme S., who was determined at all costs to play the Maecenas to artists."

"So long as she pays for the food and drink, one can't ask more, eh?" said Cornet, a Frenchman and a good sculptor, a friend of Ehrenburg and Rivera (whom he somewhat resembled because of his height and his flat feet); a good-natured, great-hearted fellow, fond of his glass, and one of my very best comrades.

It was not only at the Rotonde or at the S.s' that I met my friends. We saw each other at Marie Vasilev's canteen in an old studio in the avenue du Maine, two steps from Otto's studio. The food was very good there for the price: sixty *centimes*, I believe, for a plate of soup and one dish. There was always drink too, but not for nothing: Vasilev recouped herself on the drinks. There were always people, however, who would offer you food or drink. I often met Modigliani there, who was already well known for his sculpture (he worked on a disused piece of ground behind a house in the boulevard Montparnasse), and was also already celebrated for his great weakness for cocaine, hashish and the bottle. He had a poet's temperament: he was well read, cultured, quite disinterested, desirous of neither fortune nor fame. But he was weak, incapable of struggling against the poison of drugs and alcohol, which perhaps inspired him and perhaps also allowed him to forget the wretchedness and poverty of an artist's life.

I heard Rivera say that it was a very great artist, one of his friends, who had induced Modigliani to take the way of drug addiction and destruction. They both loved the same *femme fatale*, and one or the other must yield. . . . Rivalry in love or rivalry for fame. . . . But is this true? What at any rate is true is that under the influence of hashish or alcohol he liked reciting Dante in Italian (he had a thorough knowledge of the great poet's works). At the height of his drunkenness he had the habit of undressing, under the curious and eager eyes of some more or less faded girls, English or American, who took pleasure in frequenting Vasilev's canteen. He would stand very upright and start by undoing his girdle, which must have been four or five feet long; this done, he would let his trousers slip down to his ankles, then slowly pull his shirt up to his head, or take that off, too, and display himself quite naked, slim and white, his torso arched.

"Hi, look at me!" he would cry. "Aren't I handsome? Beautiful as a new-born babe or just out of the bath. Don't I look like a god?"

And he would start reciting verses. If it was not Dante, it would be from a little book which never left him: *Les chants de Maldoror* by Lautréamont; or perhaps he would sing in Italian. The words of his

songs were not easy to understand: he seemed to be always repeating the same one: *Capelli biondi, vestita bianca*.

There was nothing cynical or obscene about him at those moments, unlike Ortiz de Zarette, for example, who also would sometimes be overcome with love for his own body, but with whom it was dangerous to be in company in these circumstances, for undressed and exhibiting himself "like Apollo, like a child of the Sun", he would pursue women like a satyr, and as time went on this demon possessed him more violently.

Poor Modigliani! If there ever was in this world a man who was *mal-aimé*, it was surely he. He had no luck with women, I knew his three sweethearts personally, and I should find it hard to say which of the three was the most interesting. One was Simone, a little French girl, very simple and already ailing. She had a son by Modigliani and died soon afterwards. The second was English, Beatrice Hastings, and she was a woman of personality. She was intelligent and subdued, and at the same time mischievous. She led a most restless and agitated life. Not only did she get a taste for drugs, but she stupefied herself with alcohol and was always in search of adventures with men who were vulgar bohemians like herself. She "took an interest" (that is the exact phrase) in Modigliani for the moment; all the time that the liaison lasted the couple drank fearfully, quarrelling and often hitting each other. I remember that one day Modigliani locked the door of her apartment, where he had been living since he became her lover, so that Beatrice Hastings found herself unable to get into her house. She came to the Rotonde to get the key back, but Modigliani welcomed her by shouting that she was nothing but a pest, that he had had enough of living with her, and that he could not stand any more of her. The dispute became a brawl, and the painter got a good thrashing from the woman who furnished him with love and lodging. None the less, he went on claiming that the apartment belonged to him, and that he did not want her to set foot there again. Finally the key was taken from his pocket, Mrs Hastings could get in to her place, and Modigliani found himself out in the street. He was not wanted at the Rotonde after this disturbance, and in future he went to the Dôme.

We used sometimes in the evening to go to Montmartre to see Max Jacob, Modigliani and his friend Mrs Hastings. One went up big steps from the street through a little garden; there were two rooms on the ground floor, separated by the entrance passage. Perhaps there were

others, but we always stayed in the same well-lit room, in which were a small bureau, a table, chairs, a sofa and shelves full of books. A mountain of sandwiches awaited us, and bottles of every kind, to the delight of all of us. One evening, I remember, there were myself, Ehrenburg and his wife Katya, Vitya Rosenblum, Paul Cornet, the sculptor, André Delhay, our friend Mitrani, the Greek philosopher, and Carmen, a girl from Montparnasse. Beatrice Hastings, Modigliani and Max Jacob were expecting us. Nearly all the time Max Jacob argued with André Delhay – Andryushka, as I called him – about poetry and philosophy. Vitya Rosenblum, an engineer and mathematician, the son of a Russian Jew, baptized and a Catholic, was a virgin and very religious – even bigoted; and he wished Max Jacob to be a good Catholic.

The scene, then, was as follows: Mitrani making love to Carmen on the sofa, both of them pretty drunk; Max Jacob discussing philosophy with Delhay near the big bureau and watching the Greek's games with the girl; and myself, Ehrenburg and Katya singing Russian songs – or rather, shouting them, for we had not much voice. Modigliani was having an argument with Beatrice Hastings, which turned into a fight. They went for each other like fishwives, and the end of it was that Modigliani seized her by the shoulders and threw her through the window panes. She screamed, and all I could see were her legs and thighs: the rest of the unfortunate poet, painter and dancer was in the garden! Everyone rushed to look and to help her. I took the wrong door and found myself in a dark room lit only by light which came in through the open door: there I saw Vitya kneeling in the middle of the room, making great signs of the cross.

"O God, save us from the accursed one and preserve us from sin," he was repeating in Russian, and touching the floor with his forehead. I went out without saying anything, somewhat comforted by the knowledge that someone was looking after us.

Beatrice Hastings was carried into the room and laid on the sofa. She was wretched, poor woman, with her long, flat breasts daubed with blood; she was sober now, and she wept, while Modigliani repeated: "*Non mea culpa, non mea culpa.*" It was odd how their love was always so terribly violent: drinking made them quarrelsome. I preferred to see Modigliani alone: then he was a different person. The Greek, excited by the shouts and tears, and by the blood, panted with passion and pulled Carmen out into the garden: we heard them

walking on the broken glass. The party, which had been interrupted for a few minutes, went on again. Beatrice Hastings was given some coffee and covered up well with a Scotch plaid, and Modigliani told her jokes to distract her thoughts. At dawn we left the two friends on the battlefield. Modigliani was methodically tearing the remains of the wallpaper off the wall, singing, *Capelli biondi, vestita bianca*, which amazed me. Everywhere there were sleeping bodies: the bearded Greek on the floor with the girl clasped in his arms; Beatrice Hastings with her head under the sofa cushion; Max Jacob on the floor with his head against the sofa, holding a missal in his hand. Out in the yard we saw broken glass, crushed plants, dirty plates on the ground, paper, food. We ourselves were not pretty to look at, but we were not damaged or bloody.

"What an evening," said André Delhay.

"Yes," said Ehrenburg, "it was most moving, thanks to the actors. Now some hot coffee would be welcome."

"Seeing that Englishwoman naked gave me goose-flesh," said Cornet "Modigliani flattens her between two planks."

"You must be a bungler of a sculptor," I said. "You don't understand anything about a modern woman. You saw her belly, her thighs and her legs? Well, they're worth something."

At this moment Vitya, who had been about to say something, lost his balance, fell, rolled down the steps and broke his spectacles.

As for Modigliani's third (and last) young woman, she was a young French girl too. She made his acquaintance at an academy and straightaway fell in love with him. She belonged to a good bourgeois family, but had wanted to learn to paint, and had strayed to Montparnasse, where fortune had made her fall in with this splendid, dangerous fellow . . . too late for him, unfortunately. Overcoming family and social prejudices she succeeded in making a life for herself with him. Later on they married. I knew the girl well: she was beautiful, all sweetness and gentleness. She even sat to me for her portrait: I can see her now in a very clinging green frock, wearing a black velvet hat. I painted a portrait of her in the cubist manner: I do not know what has happened to it. She had a daughter by Modigliani, and her death remains closely connected with his tragic end. She followed him closely for, soon after the painter had left this world, "Haricot rouge", as she was nicknamed, threw herself out of a fourth-floor window into the street. She was then six months gone with her second baby.

Besides Vasilev's canteen and the Rotonde I also often met Modigliani at Rosalie's, where he frequently had his meals. Rosalie, fine woman that she was, was far from suspecting what a genius she was feeding more or less free. She used to slang the painter fearfully, but all the same she would finally give him something to eat . . . and drink. I have retained the memory of scenes which hurt me dreadfully; and when Modigliani succeeded in getting drunk in the little restaurant Rosalie would throw him out of the door.

He painted one of the walls of her dining room, and after his death she was offered as much as twenty thousand francs for this fresco, but she would not sell it; not that she had any idea of the value of it: she could have had canvases and drawings of his, but she always refused to accept them, being persuaded that she was dealing with a madman, and that none of these things were worth anything. None the less she was greatly affected by his death; she wept and wept, and told anyone who would listen how sorry she was not to have fed him better: perhaps, if she had, she said, she might have made him live longer.

When I said earlier that Modigliani's third and last love unfortunately occurred too late in his life – what happened was that Zborowski, a Polish poet, who also liked to sniff cocaine, had already "discovered" him and got his hands on him. He was a Polish Jew, who, with the help of the drug, took himself for a second Rimbaud. I do not know how he had cast up at Montparnasse: what I do know is that he had dragged out a wretched existence until the day when a Polish woman took him in hand and rescued him from penury and madness. She lived in the rue Joseph-Bara, and together with her he began to "protect" some painters, among them Modigliani, who was the first, and Soutine. He proposed to take me up, too, but he wanted me to change my name from Marevna to Stebel, and I refused.

To begin with Modigliani worked for Zborowski for very little money; but his wine and tobacco were assured. Zborowski would put a litre of wine on the table, or even two, and some cigarettes; then he would lock the door behind him: and Modigliani had to paint a picture. He drank more than he ate, and this, coupled with the fearful way in which he dissipated himself, finally brought him to the hospital, where he died while still young after suffering atrociously. Even while he was getting a little money from Zborowski he continued to "touch" people right and left. It was not only Rosalie who fed him more or less gratis, for he often ate free at Vasilev's canteen – although it must

be admitted that he brought with him such a train of people who paid for his drinks that Vasilev was sure of being reimbursed in the end – except sometimes, when there was a brawl: then everything was smashed.

17

MAX JACOB AND MODIGLIANI BOTH HAD GENIUS, BUT THEIR genius affected them differently. They might frequent the same circle, undergo the same temptations, sometimes even live under the same roof: but Max Jacob's terribly critical and analytical intelligence enabled him to struggle against it all, while Modigliani, too soft and weak, was incapable of struggling and allowed himself to be drawn down the slippery slope. In this sense one may say that he occupies a unique place among the victims of that turbulent, febrile, tainted era of the war of 1914.

In return for a glass of wine Modigliani would make you a present of a remarkable drawing, done anywhere and at any time of day or night, which was always interesting and sometimes amazing – for a mere glass of wine. Many are the people who received them from him in this way and who preserved them like veritable treasures. He gave me several (portraits of myself, or of Rivera or of himself) which I in my turn gave away to my friends. At Cagnes once, where I was living then, someone came to see me with a portrait of me, dating from that time. It was a drawing he had given me as a present and which I had given to the well-known Russian painter Larionov who, with his wife Goncharova, designed for the Russian Ballet. Larionov must later have sold the drawing to someone else. And I was offered it back for a mere 30,000 francs!

The last time I saw Modigliani, at Montparnasse a short time before he died, he had just come back from Cagnes. He told me that he was then getting from Zborowski a monthly allowance of three thousand francs. In one way this was not bad for those times, but one must not forget that he was married and already had a child dependent on him. He told me, besides, on that day:

"I'm getting fat and becoming a respectable citizen at Cagnes-sur-mer. I'm going to have two kids: it's unbelievable. It's sickening!"

He looked well, none the less. It was after he had gone back to living in Paris, and had begun taking drugs and drinking again, that he fell seriously ill.

After his death his canvases naturally were in demand, and fetched high prices. Certain picture-dealers went so far as to find artists sufficiently skilful and dishonest to produce forged Modiglianis, which sold like hot cakes.

Rivera had a very great affection for Modigliani and always regretted that he gave up sculpture. For my part, I know few tales so shocking to think of as his. It is frightful that such a great artist – the greatest, perhaps, of all those of that time from Montmartre and Montparnasse – can have been, during his lifetime, so neglected and unrecognized, both as a man and as a painter. I sometimes go to see the house at Cagnes where he lived. It stands on a pretty hill and through the shrubs I let my gaze wander about the garden, full of shadow and mystery; and I seem to see Modigliani walking or stooping down in the shade, and reciting verses from the favourite little book that he always carried.

The people of Cagnes remember him too, and Soutine; but it is their poverty they talk about, and the jollifications that they used to have in the old days, on credit.

* * *

Modigliani's friend Soutine had better luck. He was extremely poor when he arrived in Paris from the very depths of Russia. I knew him then, but only by sight. He looked like a young Eskimo: his face was ungraceful, broad and highly coloured, his eyes sunken, reddened and tilted upwards towards the temples, his nose fleshy and flattened, always red and glistening, his lips gross and damp, his chin short and pointed. He had no beard, but his hair, which was thick and black, was cut in a fringe over his broad, low forehead. This last gave him a very odd appearance. Zadkine and Picasso had their hair cut in the same way, it is true, but Soutine really was not good-looking; moreover he stooped. Only his hands were beautiful (at least I thought so) and very expressive: they did his speaking for him. During the first part of his stay in Paris he lived in a big house full of studios called *la Ruche* (the Beehive), and I saw him only seldom, for I lived in a quite different part of the town; besides, he was wild and shy, and fled

from the society of people. Krémègne and Epstein, his companion, told all sorts of stories about him: for example, one day Soutine had the unexpected luck to pick up a young wench who was ready and willing; but he did not know how to receive her at his place.

"Listen," his two friends said, "*primo*, buy a toothbrush." (Soutine had very ugly, ill-kept teeth.) "Next, buy a clean shirt and at least put a sheet on your bed. Like that it'll go off all right. . . ."

So Soutine bought the things. He tidied up his studio a bit and put the toothbrush on the table in a glass, like a flower. The clean shirt he spread out on a chair. Everything was ready. The little woman came, and very quickly made off again, never to return. Soutine was very sad.

"What happened, then? She wasn't pleased?" his pals asked. "How did you set about it?"

"I bought a toothbrush and put it in a glass, as you told me; I also bought a shirt, which cost me a good deal, and put it on a chair, so that she could see it properly. I turned the sheet inside out; but obviously she was a high-class tart: she didn't want to go to bed with *one* sheet."

I myself did not in fact come to know him better, more intimately, until 1927. He was then living quite close to me, and one day, passing the house where he lived – I had my daughter with me, who was eight years old – I determined to see him again after so many years. I found him in, looking as he always had, only paler and thinner. He looked at me in astonishment with mournful, black eyes from under red-rimmed lids:

"My goodness! Well, this really is a pleasant surprise!" he said.

He had a big apartment, with a bathroom; but everything was so dusty, there were so many cigarette-ends everywhere and such heaps of old newspapers on the floor, rags, bits of paper, torn-up sheets of cardboard and empty paint-tubes that my daughter opened her eyes wide and asked him:

"I say, Soutine, haven't you got a housekeeper? Give me a broom and I'll clean up a bit."

And straight away she started shifting things about and wiping off all the dust.

"Your daughter's pretty, Marevna. And it's odd: she looks like her father, but there's something of you too."

While my daughter was playing housekeeper Soutine got tea ready. He could not understand how it was that I had come to see him, I who would never have set foot there while he was poor.

"You were so proud, Marevna, and I was so poor."

I did not care to tell him that in those days I had known young fellows who were as poor as he, and Jews like him – Ehrenburg and Zadkine for example – but what had stopped me was that he was so hopelessly dirty. The best proof of this was that, now that he lived in a sumptuous apartment, he had succeeded in turning it into a pig-sty. I knew that the cause of it must be sought in the utter solitariness in which he lived; he had no woman about him to take care of him and show a little affection and patience; and this was what he needed. Creative work was a great labour to him: he often wept over it and tore to pieces a canvas that he had started. If the charwoman who looked after the apartment was too talkative for his taste he showed her the door; which was why no one in that part of the town was willing to come and work for him. And besides the dirtiness of the apartment there was his nature, which it was hard for those excellent, simple women to put up with, when they could not understand that they were dealing with a great artist. I promised to send him up my own house-keeper to do some thorough cleaning; and this was how we began to see each other from time to time.

One day he showed me a letter from his family:

"Look, Marevna; this letter is from my father. Once upon a time he used to beat me like a dog. No one in my family loved me. I was ugly already, and always ill. My father wanted to make a tailor of me, and I wanted to be a painter: I loved drawing. What harm they did me! And now they've heard that I'm making a lot of money, and my old man writes that life in Russia is frightfully dear, that they've got old and they're sick. It gives me the pip, a letter like that, you know. In one way I'm sorry for them; but on the other hand I can't forget that they never wished me anything but ill. I might have pegged out long ago, and no one would have thought of helping me, or sending me a word to cheer me up or a bit of money. And now that I'm here, and learning French and philosophy and how to conduct myself in a drawing room and how to behave with women – all this doesn't prevent my sometimes getting the hump and feeling homesick for my village . . . for everything! What ought I to do? Go back or stay here and carry on?"

I was touched by his confidence in me, by his avowals. I even felt compassion for the young fellow who was so sad, pessimistic, and often cynical.

"Women, Marevna? Well, I have several friends among those society women. They come for me in their great, luxurious wagons to take me to their houses. Married women. these are. What do you think they want from me? My pictures, of course. They go to bed with me, although it disgusts them, and afterwards they ask me for a canvas. That means twenty or thirty thousand francs, sometimes more. And if I give them this canvas they can sell it, in two or three years, for twice or three times as much. Even today, if they have the luck to come upon a rich amateur, it can show a pretty profit. They're never anything but whores. I know that I'm ugly and ailing: I'm not even capable of enjoyment like anyone else. I can't beget a child. So what sense is there in all this farce about love and bedding with society ladies? At bottom they're worth no more than girls from the streets. . . ."

That is how Soutine talked in those days. Was he to change later on, and find a woman who would love him honestly for himself and not for his money? I never knew. One of my friends, P.L., who was much interested in Soutine's painting and wanted a picture of his – "not too dear", of course – made this proposal: Since I knew Soutine already, what was there to prevent me from going and suggesting that he should paint my portrait, or my daughter's? Then P.L. would buy the picture for twenty thousand francs . . . what's called *quid pro quo*. Indeed it would have helped us a lot, my daughter and me, to live a quiet life for some time, and it would have allowed me, by freeing me from other anxieties, to work for myself at my painting.

But when I met Soutine again and saw that he was living quite near, the thought that perhaps he was expecting every day that I too would beg something from him – I above all, who came to see him as a friend – deprived me of the strength and audacity to ask him for anything. One evening, as we came back from the cinema, he wanted me to stay with him – there were times when he could not stand being alone – so I spent the night with him. He was a bad lover: perhaps he was shy. What he thirsted for above all was tenderness and affection. He spoke of himself, his sickness, his loneliness, his work and his bitterness towards life and towards women. Then, when one day he told me of his own accord that he very much wanted to paint a portrait of my daughter, but that he was afraid of frightening her, "because he sometimes howled with joy while he was painting," and when my daughter

refused to sit for him, I did not urge him to paint me. Who knows? Perhaps in her place I should have been scared myself!

Time passed and our ways parted. We went to live in different parts of the town, and then I left for Holland and never had the opportunity of seeing him again; but I have seen his painting again, and I like it: it is the work of a great painter.

I shall always remember what Zborowski told me about how he "launched" Soutine. He had been helping Soutine to live for a good time already; but the canvases, badly composed and sometimes soiled, always stamped with his neurasthenia, were not much liked by the collectors. Zborowski was in despair. He was encumbered by a considerable accumulation of Soutine's pictures. One day he gave them to his charwoman with orders to put them into the fire. At this moment an American came to see him, a well-known buyer of pictures whose name I have forgotten. The visitor rummaged everywhere, looked, examined, took a few canvases of Modigliani's and spotted on a wall a picture of Soutine's.

"And that one: who's that by? I like that a lot. Have you any others?"

Zborowski dashed into the kitchen in a cold sweat, looked for the pictures that had been stuffed into the stove, which fortunately had not been lit that day, and fished them out. He smoothed them with an iron and brought them to the American, who bought them all, and for a good price. Zborowski found himself paid back three or four times what the painter had cost him.

It was from that day that Soutine's pictures began to go up in price. He soon began selling his work himself. He was capricious and always dissatisfied. He sometimes ran round to the *hôtel des Ventes* if he heard that one of his pictures was being disposed of, and would buy it back, in order to destroy it, if he thought it was not good.

One evening, when I was there, he was rung up. He had a cheque for twenty thousand francs on the table in front of him. That same morning he had sold one of his pictures, and now the buyer was telephoning to complain of the red in the picture, which was beginning to crack, and to ask that his red should be "repaired".

"I have thought it over, *cher monsieur*," Soutine replied. "I am returning your cheque: give me back my picture. I consider that it hasn't come off. . . . Yes, yes: I insist on your giving it back, since I am returning your money. I refuse to try to improve a canvas which is a failure."

I do not know whether finally he did restore the canvas. I thought I understood very well that the client, for his part, absolutely refused to give it back.

18

I MUST SAY A WORD HERE ABOUT ROSALIE, OF WHOM I HAVE already spoken in connection with Modigliani. Who did not know that *crémèrie* of hers? Like the Rotonde, like Vasilev's canteen, it was an institution in the Montparnasse of those days. Is there an artist of that time who cannot have known the old Italian woman, who spent a good part of her time struggling with customers who refused to pay? But fundamentally what a fine woman she was! In her restaurant one was at home. She helped not only Modigliani, who was her darling in spite of their disputes, but numbers of other artists as well. She had a son whom I knew when he was no more than fourteen or fifteen: he was said to be the son of a Russian prince; but the boy had a prodigious resemblance to his mother. He was of the Neapolitan type, thin, with skin of a magnificent brown. When Rosalie abused him and shouted threats at him for his slowness or God knows what peccadillo (the reason was never a serious one: the boy ran errands for his mother or sometimes for a customer, and helped wait at table), he remained silent, glued to the wall, his hands hanging down, watching his mother, giving no sign of anger or defiance. This displeased Rosalie greatly and she would call him *asino*, *buricco* and other Italian epithets infinitely less flattering; yet he never reacted to these furious attacks. He was much liked.

I still see him now, walking past my window at Vieux Cagnes-sur-mer every day, with his expressionless face, never chattering, always solitary, rather untidy, but clean. He lives all alone in a little hut, I do not know how.

"I am a philosopher," he says.

Properly speaking, he has not the features of a Slav. It is possible,

though, that a mixture of Latin and Nordic blood, plebian and aristocratic, may be the origin of a temperament which induced him to abandon his environment once and for all. Perhaps with a broader education, with greater culture, it might have produced someone remarkable; but even as he is, when he passes close to me, greeting me with a vague smile and talking to himself, with that rather uncertain step peculiar to him, he looks like nobody else at Cagnes.

Is he happy? Does he hold fast the memory of Modigliani, that other laughing-stock of his mother's? I only know that after Rosalie's death he found himself the owner of several drawings and canvases by the painter – too few, however, to make his fortune.

I have called Rosalie an institution of those days. . . .

I would go there sometimes to eat delicious Italian dishes; and it was there that I saw for the first time an engaging giant, who was none other than Rivera, dressed like a workman in blue dungarees stained with paint. With him was Angelina Beloff, a Russian, a celebrated engraver. He was often accompanied by two of his friends, Lipchitz and Meshchaninov, the sculptors, who were Russian too. I liked everything oriental, and I am sure that it was this side of Rivera's genius which attracted me. Apart from Picasso he is the only one among that crowd of artists that I really liked. He was not handsome, but physically he resembled a tall Saracen. He was beginning to be known, but he was still rather poor, and before the war Angelina helped him to live. She used to receive a little money from her family, and also earned a little by her engraving. So little by little my circle of friends became defined, and we soon began to be always seen together: Rivera, Angelina (though she often stayed at home), Ehrenburg, Voloshin, Boris Savinkov (less frequently than the others), Paul Cornet, Modigliani, Zadkine, Picasso and his wife, and myself. After the war our group was sometimes joined by Kisling, Léger, Apollinaire and Max Jacob. We used to meet also at Poiret's in the rue du Faubourg St-Honoré, where exhibitions were organized.

During the war Fernand Léger was called up, and his wife, Jeanne, who was very amusing, nice and pretty, stayed in Paris. She was full of gaiety and wit, and had many friends. We used to meet at her husband's studio at Notre Dame des Champs, and there we spent joyful, uproarious hours. Jeanne showed me the letters she received from her husband who was then at the front. There were very fine pen-drawings to be seen in them, very curiously composed (sketches of robots, one

would have said). He also sent her money, which Jeanne spent at once in gay company. I shall never forget one evening with her which turned out very badly for me. One of her best friends, a Polish woman who was a sculptor, had died suddenly in hospital. She was a small woman, extremely fascinating, gifted with great sex-appeal, who led a fast life and had her fling – so much so that it was clear that she would sooner or later end up in hospital. Her family sent her money from Poland, with which she could live free of care, do little work, enjoy herself very much, and have many love-affairs. Jeanne knew her well, but I knew her only by sight. We went with the funeral procession to Montrouge cemetery and came back late in the evening, chilled and so saddened by the ceremony that we went to Jeanne's to drink and to comfort her. We all thought of ourselves or of those near and dear to us: I was thinking of my father, who by now had been dead for a year. When I left Jeanne's studio in the boulevard Montparnasse I sat down for a moment – not like everybody else, but on the back of the bench – and stayed perched there like a bird. Suddenly I felt giddy from all the wine I had drunk and from the fatigue of the day spent at the church and the cemetery, and I fell backwards onto my skull. It did not seem to be much: simply a bump which soon felt better.

But after some days my eyes began to swell and my eyelids to shut down over them. I ran to the hospital to see the doctor. They analysed my urine and a sample of my blood in the hope of discovering the cause of this strange phenomenon. I went home, but one day I could hardly discern my face in the glass; my eyes were almost closed, my face was misshapen and I looked like an old Eskimo woman. I could not go out with a face like that: besides, I was nearly blind. Thereupon I got into bed and began to say to myself: "You've done heaps of stupid things; you've wasted heaps of precious time instead of working: well done! The foolish vanity of a pretty girl, laziness, heedlessness, that is all finished, quite finished. There's nothing left but to wait for the inevitable: a sad end, but I've earned it."

For one day, two days I remained like that. No one came to see me, not even my *concierge*. I stayed in bed, my eyes shut, in absolute darkness, counting the time by the noises of the school children that reached me as it was time for them to go to school, come back for lunch, set off again, and come home in the evening. I was plagued by hunger and very cold: this was in November.

Suddenly one evening I heard someone coming upstairs: there

was a knock at the door, which was not locked, and Jeanne came in.

"Well, my dear: what are you doing in the dark? Have you been struck dumb?"

She lit the lamp, looked at me and cried out:

"But it's frightful, what's happened to you, my poor old girl! Listen: I'm going to fetch a taxi: we'll collect some of your togs and I'll take you to my place. Everyone's been asking where you've got to, and to think that you were here all alone and ill. There, now!"

She ran for a taxi and then helped me downstairs and put me into it; but before leaving she insisted on going to see the *concierge* who had left me all alone like that. The poor woman was in bed, too, with influenza.

"I say, your shanty seems pretty unlucky," said Jeanne.

When she had put me to bed in her studio, made a cup of tea and prepared something to eat, she went out again, still at a run, to the Rotonde, to inform my friends and especially to look for a Danish doctor, a lover of the arts, who drank like a fish, but cared for sick artists for nothing with a rare devotion. He came at once, already rather drunk. He examined me carefully and affirmed that it was the result of a shock. He wrote a prescription, and Jeanne galloped off to the chemist's and brought back ointments and heaps of bottles of medicine and things for bathing my eyes with, as well as bandages to protect them from the light. It would have been very funny if it had not been rather sad. I now looked as if I had been badly wounded, and for several days more I had to put up with not being able to see; during which time Max Voloshin, Ehrenburg and Katya, Rivera and Cornet and numbers of others filed past me, coming to gaze at the spectacle of my bandaged head.

"It's funny to see you without your face," said Voloshin. "It isn't Marevna any more: it's a nameless being. Only your mouth still tells me it's you: even your voice is altered."

At this, the Danish doctor kissed me on the lips. I drew back.

"Oh! Oh! You little devil," said the doctor. "We'll be able to profit by this now – the wild girl that one could never get near!"

Voloshin came to sit by me and took me in his arms.

"Now, now," he said: "don't hurt her. I know that she's already repenting of many things, and as soon as she's well everything will be different, won't it?"

I felt tears stinging my eyes. It was true: I swore to myself and promised my friends that in future I would be good.

Suddenly Cornet started singing in a voice that was ever so slightly raucous:

*"Au café d'la Rotonde
Une petite Marevna il y avait
Qui chantait tous les jours
Qu'elle allait s'en aller;
Et puis elle est tombée,
Ell' s'est cassé la tête,
Ell' s'est fait mal aux yeux,
Pauv' petit' Marevna!
Pauv' petit' Marevna!"*

Everybody laughed, and Jeanne sent them away. The doctor assured me he would come back next day – to kiss me on the mouth, he said with a laugh. I heard Voloshin murmur to Jeanne that he would come back next day, too, to bring her some money to pay her back for what I was costing her. I may say that I was enormously lucky to have such good friends.

I slept upstairs in the loft with Jeanne. On the first night we suddenly heard in the silence and darkness a noise on the stairs.

"You know," Jeanne whispered (she was a fine girl and managed her life very well, but terribly funky and imaginative), "I believe that's Sonya coming upstairs, as she used to do every evening."

"Sonya? Who's Sonya?" I asked half-asleep.

"My friend who's dead. Sonya Antonevich . . . You hear? . . . You hear? . . . Now she's stopped outside the door. She's going to knock!"

Jeanne ducked under the bed-clothes and covered her eyes with her hands. I remained petrified. . . . Nothing happened, however.

"Poor thing!" Jeanne went on. "She's gone down because she realized I wasn't alone. D'you know, if I hadn't found you ill, if I hadn't brought you back with me, I should never have been able to sleep here alone: I should certainly have gone to someone else's to sleep. Fortunately you're here, and I can see you're brave."

Thereupon we went to sleep.

Several days passed during which, as I say, I still could see nothing. I suffered, but I knew that my accident would do me good: it gave me a chance to plumb the depths, the darkness, of my being.

It was extremely strange to listen to the voices of friends and to guess, to "see" better than with my eyes, all that was happening round me. I knew Jeanne well enough to know that she would take advantage of the presence of my friends to flirt with them, but I did not care: there was only one that I might be jealous of, but he came seldom, and when he came he was never alone. With the others she could have her fun: I only laughed. One evening, when she was specially gay and unrestrained, and when Voloshin was there sitting on the sofa beside me and holding my hand, I gently lifted the bandage and, for the first time for twenty days, I believe, I *saw* – still indistinctly – but I saw Jeanne absolutely naked, ironing her linen on the table and doing all sorts of crazy things. She would tell some story, then jump about and turn pirouettes, looking like a little she-devil dancing before the poor gross St Antony who stayed calmly at my side.

"Here, I say, you're cheating, old girl," I said. "You've never dared yet to show yourself stark naked before me and my friends."

She burst out laughing, though she looked rather shame-faced all the same. •

"But you can't see anything. You're imagining it, darling."

She was embarrassed, none the less, and put on a dressing-gown.

"Either you want to seduce poor Max, who is so blameless," I added, "or you're making a fool of him and you're nothing but a little trollop!"

19

LITTLE BY LITTLE, HOWEVER, MY SIGHT RETURNED, AND with it pleasure in being alive. There was a great gathering of my friends to celebrate my recovery: there might be the war, and absences and permanent blanks caused by it, but the artists who had escaped it so far made haste to live, and to take great mouthfuls of the life that was menaced day by day.

On my last morning with Jeanne there was a knock at the door very early. Jeanne ran down to open it and I heard an exclamation from her and then a fit of the giggles such as only she was capable of. I also

heard the voice of Ehrenburg saying something or other. Then he came in and I realized what was up. For some time already he had been drinking too much – much too much. At the café, with us in the street, at Jeanne's, he would utter strident shouts: we never knew exactly whether this was a joke or if it was the effect of some kind of *delirium tremens*. At other times he did not sleep all night. He would sit up very late writing, and then go straight out and knock about Paris. In the morning he would be found at the Rotonde, grey in the face and exhausted, writing his article. Sometimes he even disappeared for several days, having gone to the front with Boris Savinkov under the aegis of the Red Cross or on a "revictualling" errand. They both looked and listened and then came back to Paris and set to work at their articles, each in his own fashion. Or Ehrenburg would go off and carry packing-cases at a station to earn a little money. At any rate, Ilya began to be a bit crazy. That morning he had been picked up wandering in the street and taken to the police-station, then sent to Charenton.¹ There his head had been shaved and it was a most surprising sight. One was so used to seeing him with his hair falling down to his shoulders that, finding him with his skull quite smooth, a head as long and narrow as a horse's and quite pale, no one could help laughing. For his part he was obstreperous and rebellious in the highest degree. He kept repeating:

"I believe I'm really going mad! Tell me the truth, Jeanne: am I mad or aren't I? And you tell me the truth too, Marevna."

Jeanne made some good, strong coffee and we drank it together. I found that Ehrenburg had changed, but I did not understand why. I told myself that everybody inevitably changed little by little: it was the war, and it was hard on us too; we were all more or less put to the test.

I finally got my looks back and set to work again enthusiastically. I remember going one evening about then to the Salon des Indépendants and noticing a big picture by Rivera which mystified me, *La Vierge enceinte*. After this I met Rivera himself somewhere, and he said he was very glad to see my face again after such a long absence (though only three weeks had passed since my illness at Jeanne's). We talked of his painting and he asked whether I would like to go to his studio to see some canvases. I went, and my visit made me very thoughtful: I liked his painting very much and I was deeply moved by it.

¹ A lunatic asylum.

While I was there I noticed that Angelina spoke to this great giant as though he were a small boy: "*muchachito*", "*detochka*", "*bébé*", she said to him. And he talked similarly to her. They seemed very closely united and very happy. I left them promising myself to see him again as little as possible. "That chap isn't for you," I told myself. "Look round: it's not friends you're short of. And you could find something infinitely better. . . ." Had I a presentiment that he would influence me greatly and turn my whole life upside down? It is strange that I avoided this big, unusual man, but felt myself oddly drawn towards him.

About this time Ehrenburg left for the south with his wife, Katya, their little daughter, a man friend and young Russian girl, a singer. It was Ilya's health that required their departure.

I was not all at well myself. I could not eat and was contorted with pain. Sometimes the Riveras asked me to dinner, but I had hardly swallowed a bite when I was in such agony that I had to lie down. One doctor advised one thing, another the opposite. All my friends were either in the soup or away. I felt desperate.

In the nick of time a letter came from the Ehrenburgs with some money: they pressed me to take the train at once and come to where they were, at Èze, near Nice. I set off at once, after saying *au revoir* to Rivera, vexed at leaving him but glad at the same time to be freed from the invisible chains that bound me to him. What a joy it was to be with the Ehrenburgs again, in their villa on a hill. A good dinner was waiting for me: lobster, all kinds of *zakuski*, and an impressive number of bottles.

"I won money at the casino at Monte Carlo," said Ilya. "So you see: we thought of you, Marevna."

I could not touch a single one of the delicacies, nor drink, either.

Next day a friend of Ilya's, Tikhon, another journalist, took me in to Nice to see Dr Rosanov, said to be the best doctor in the town.

When I had undressed he began by complimenting me on my physique:

"It is always pleasant to have a pretty girl for a patient."

I told him about the sort of life I had led in Paris, the canteens, the exhaustion; and he prescribed something perfectly simple: I was to begin my cure with sun-bathing, ten minutes every morning, uncovering myself little by little and increasing the time of exposure until I could stand half an hour naked; that was the maximum. He

also prescribed Belloc's charcoal and milk of magnesia – and no tinned food.

"You'll see: in a week you'll be fit again, and you shall come to me and taste one of these wines; that will do you the greatest good."

I was indeed cured, thanks to the sunbathing, I really believe, and to a simple, healthy diet. Since then I have always taken sun-baths and eaten quantities of yoghurt. But I never went back to see the good doctor, even to thank him: I was afraid of his cellar, his famous wine and above all of his fine beard. (I remembered that once at Tiflis a gipsy had foretold that a bearded man would wreck my life, and since then, like a simpleton, I had mistrusted bearded men.)

The days I spent at Èze were very happy ones: I forgot my financial difficulties, and I got back my health and my poise. Although my father was dead I continued to associate him with my joys and sorrows, as before. My grief had waned, and I could look into the future with hope, because I had true friends who were interested in me and participated in my life – which consisted in work, struggle and poverty.

Our pink villa was hidden in pink rose-trees and surrounded by olives with a black cypress standing up among them here and there. The cicadas, maddened like me by the intoxicating scents and by the heat of the summer sun, sang from morning till night, and when night came the crickets began their monotonous tune which I have always loved. Hundreds of glow-worms gleamed with their phosphorescent green and gave their mysterious signals in the dark thickets. The sea summoned me early in the morning and I adored swimming in the mornings and after sunset, when the water was warm and still. I looked down into the transparent waters and envied the fish that fled from my shadow. I envied the sea-wrack so mysteriously sunk in the depths, which changed colour with the course of the sun. I saw the crabs with their ridiculous gait and teased them with my foot. I was filled with a mad glee and sang and shouted at the top of my voice. I wanted to be a fish, a swallow that grazes the surface of the water with its wing. On my return to the villa I felt wholly renewed and purified by the water: at those moments I loved life and all the world.

"It's amazing how you change, Marevna," Ilya used to say. "One might think you really are a sea-nymph."

It was the sun, the sea, the song of the cicadas, and above all the blessed friendship that my friends offered me that worked the miracle. I began to live and work again.

We did a lot of work at Èze. If at Biarritz I had done nothing, here I painted several cubist pictures. We took turns to do the cooking. For a whole week one had to prepare the midday meals for five people, which was no joke; especially since Ehrenburg, who was the worst cook of all, was also the severest critic. Faced with some of his meals we got angry; we went down to the beach where there was a little *bistrot* which gave one a bite to eat fairly cheaply. In the end we laughed. Thanks to the sun, sea and friends, it was a pleasant life in spite of everything.

On some days Ehrenburg, his friend, Tikhon, and Katya, after putting Myshka ("little mouse") to bed, started drinking "till the soul left the body", as Ehrenburg's very nice wife used to say. She was no longer truly his wife, and that was what made Ilya so irritable. Katya was in love with Tikhon, a gentle fellow and a good sort, not brilliant or a genius, but a friend one could count on; for after some years of life with Ilya, who was talented and had a sparkling, sarcastic wit, Katya had grown tired of his temperament which, alas, was freakish, too, and exigent – even fearfully selfish. The day came when she could no longer share Ehrenburg's bed (full of tobacco ash), though this did not prevent their remaining good friends. She later married Tikhon, in the Caucasus, I believe, and had several children by him. For myself I was very fond of all three, especially Ilya and Katya.

Apart from work our time was quite full. We went to Nice often to see Boris Savinkov and his wife Marusya. Her brother, an officer, had taken Boris's place in his cell, after the latter had been condemned to death, and so allowed him to escape. Boris, as soon as he could, took charge of the old mother and married the sister "to discharge his debt".

There was the time, too, when some gendarmes saw me bathing naked, but from too far away to tell whether I was a man or a woman. Even when they caught me on the way back, in shorts and with a kerchief round my hair, they were still puzzled and I did not enlighten them. The next day two of them came to the house and asked about me. Surely, if I was naked they could tell, Ilya said. Oh, they hadn't been as close as that. Then, if they couldn't tell, where was the harm? Forbidden. Papers! Then, seeing only four people they asked where the fifth was. I had been hiding under the bed, but Ilya gave me away, and I had to promise that I would let the gendarmes know my sex in a few days when I had had time to send for my papers, which, in my scatter-brained way, I had left in Paris. They agreed, and everyone

had a drink except me: I slipped away. The papers came all right, and at last the gendarmes were satisfied about my sex.

Sometimes we climbed to the top of the hill on which the old village of Èze is perched. There was a marvellous view from there over the whole extent of the bay of Nice and Monte Carlo. Seen from a distance Èze looked like a real corsairs' lair; and its old churches, its ramparts, the narrow alleys full of shadow, and its people, simple and peaceful-looking – we liked it all enormously. We would go down again towards sunset, in order not to annoy Ehrenburg, who was waiting for us at the villa: his heart would not let him climb so far.

He did bathe, though: or rather, he would go to the edge of the water, wet his feet and hands and then remain pensively warming himself in the sun, exposing his too-white body all covered with long black hairs, like an orang-outang's. I could not help laughing when I looked at him from some distance: he really looked a sloth. In fact one of our friends – Paul Cornet, I believe – had nicknamed him "the sloth", and it stuck to him for a long time.

During my stay at Èze I received two letters from Rivera, in which, cryptically, he expressed his fondness for me; but I refused to take this seriously. Ilya kept saying: "*Ton* Mexicain . . . *ton* sauvage . . ." and this infuriated me, though at the same time I liked it. And I knew that Rivera was married and I thought determinedly: "Not for me" – to say nothing of the fact that I was always rather scared of him. When I saw him alone in the street I ran like a rabbit to the other pavement and pretended not to see him – a trick which exasperated him. I knew also that he was very fond of women, and that he was courteous, prepossessing and an agreeable talker.

20

BACK IN PARIS I BEGAN TO SEE MORE AND MORE OF RIVERA from force of circumstances, for all my friends used to go and see him. I posed for him at this time and could watch him at work. Many artists visited him, to talk about painting, especially about cubism, construc-

tion and Cézanne, whose work he had a passion for. Among others André Lhôte came, who was very curious about modern theories, and Diego gave him long explanations of his work, and his principles; Matisse, too, who refused to accept the doctrines of cubism and futurism but wanted to understand Cézanne. I was passionately interested in the discussions of these men and, under Rivera's influence, I also learned to see nature and objects from a different angle. My love of art became deeper and more complete.

Picasso, "the mysterious and diabolical Picasso", as the Russians called him: it was at Rivera's that I met him, as I did Cocteau, Max Jacob, Apollinaire, Larionov, Goncharova, Blanchard, Favorit, Matisse, Juan Gris, Friesz and so many others.

Picasso was rather short, wiry and well proportioned. His hair was very black with blue lights in it; his eyes, too, were very black and shone with an extraordinary brilliance, which they have kept to this day. I could realize his presence in the middle of a crowd merely by the brilliance of his glance which seemed literally to spring out of the mass of other faces with some fascinating, hypnotic effect.

When he was young he wore black, striped trousers, a short jacket, also black, wide open and displaying a broad, pink girdle wrapped round his waist in the pure toreador style.

All the pretty models and actresses and dressmakers from the big fashion houses were mad about him, to say nothing of the women of the world and the *demi-monde*. Later, during his cubist period, he wore a red tie, a cap and an ample, checked cloak, which made him look rather like a character from the circus.

Everything has already been said and said again about this extraordinary being, this extraordinary painter. I remember Rivera's telling me that when Picasso arrived in Paris from Barcelona he was extremely poor, and used to sell pipes which he made, carved and decorated himself – for five francs apiece!

His first dealings with Apollinaire and Max Jacob turned into a solid friendship, and the two great French poets played a great part in the artistic and spiritual development of the painter; but he owes the beginnings of his fame to an American, a great lover of painting, Leo Stein. It was he who first bought Picasso's pictures (and Matisse's and Friesz's too) in 1912. This was, besides, the Spanish painter's best period, in my opinion; his blue period, inspired by El Greco.

I made his acquaintance at the time of Negro art, of the beginnings

of cubism and of *collages*. Morozov, in Moscow, was already buying pictures by Picasso for his gallery, and the Russians called the painter "*le diabolique*" . . . which flattered him, I think. His second wife was a Russian dancer from Diaghilev's Ballet. The unfortunate woman had had to give up dancing after breaking a toe. She presented Pablo with a son. They were divorced after twenty years of marriage. He also had a son by a foreign artist; and it is well known that he has recently married a charming young French girl, by whom he has had a boy, Claude, whom he worships, and a little girl, Paloma.

He has always been much talked of, most often disparagingly. That is the price that the great have to pay. I myself have always liked him as a painter and esteemed him as a man. He earns big money nowadays, but he gives generously to the cause he has adopted. He helps those compatriots of his who have talent and whom he considers worthy of succour. He supports three families over and above his own. His son is now married and continues to live peacefully in the shadow of his gigantic father.

I remember that one day Voloshin, Ehrenburg, Katya, Savinkov and I decided to go and visit Picasso. He had then moved from Montmartre to live opposite the Montparnasse cemetery – in the rue Froidevaux, if I remember rightly. (He moved again after that to Montrouge, where his studio was burgled.) We were at his door at eleven o'clock: he opened it himself, wearing a blue-and-white striped bathing-dress and a bowler hat. He made us look into all the rooms – and there were plenty of them, all arranged to serve as backgrounds for his still-lives and portraits. There was nothing but drawings everywhere, and canvases, and piles of books cluttering up the tables and chairs. The floor was strewn with stained painting rags, cigarette-ends and a heap of newspapers. On a big easel there was prepared a canvas, big and mysterious. . . . No one at first risked asking what it represented, for fear of blundering. There we stood, respectful, silent, stupefied and amazed in spite of ourselves by the power and imagination of it. Picasso, who had already astonished us with his striped bathing-dress, was continuing his efforts in the same line. It was Voloshin, finally, who could not restrain a poet's curiosity and asked:

"What does the picture represent, *maître*?"

"Oh, nothing much, you know," Picasso answered, smiling. "Between ourselves . . . it's some dung – good for idiots."

"Thank you, thank you," said Voloshin and Ehrenburg.

"Don't think it's for your sake that I said that, *chers messieurs*," Picasso went on. "You're different . . . only I often have to work for fools who are ignorant about art, and my dealer is always asking me to do something to astonish the public." Now, was Picasso being sincere?

He was not very talkative on that day; perhaps our visit was preventing his abandoning himself, in his bathroom and his fine bathing-dress, to a spell of swimming. He saw us to the door as nicely and pleasantly as possible. Later on he felt a simple comradeship for me, and half-jokingly invited me to come one day and have a bathe at his house – "only give me notice because my bathroom is always dirty." About the same time Voloshin was preparing to leave for Russia, and asked me to go with him. Picasso said to me: "Don't go! What the blazes! Here we shall make an artist of you, someone even greater than Marie" (Marie Laurencin). Rivera said nothing, but he looked at me oddly and I understood that he, too, wanted to me stay.

One day Rivera showed my pictures to Matisse, who thought them very interesting: they were cubist pictures. Somewhat later Diego brought to my studio in the rue Asseline Paul Rosenberg, with whom he had just signed a contract. It was very cold at my place: there was no fire and I was wearing a cloak, and a *bashlyk*, a Caucasian fur hood, on my head. Rosenberg was struck by the look of my studio, which was very long, with a low ceiling, and in the winter was dark – and also somewhat, perhaps, by the sight of me. He bought two canvases and Rivera confided to me that he might possibly offer me a contract. I was in the seventh heaven, but unfortunately they parted soon afterwards and cancelled their contract.

Rivera was determined to be free to work as he wished. He wanted to give up cubism gradually and continue freely with his constructivist experiments, but in a more discrete form, less uniformly flat. The pictures that he painted thenceforward bore the impress of the influence of Rousseau, Renoir, Gauguin and Cézanne (whom he admired most of them all). He showed me, setting them close to each other, several tracings of pictures by Cézanne and by artists of the Flemish school; and I could see that Cézanne himself had been seeking to construct his works on something of the same system.

While Rivera was still working for Rosenberg Picasso used to come and see him at any hour, to talk and to look at his pictures, for he was always curious about all artists, their methods of working, and any-

thing that might be new and interesting. Rivera was furious each time and said to me more than once:

"He sickens me, Pablo does. If he pinches something from me it'll always be Picasso, Picasso, but as for me, they'll say I copy him. One of these days I shall chuck him out, or *I* shall shove off to Mexico."

When I was at Èze I had a letter in which he told me that Picasso had come to see him in his studio in the rue du Départ and, as he usually did, had started turning the pictures over to look at them. Diego had abused him and they had nearly come to blows – "He left when he saw me pick up my Mexican stick and when I threatened to break his skull." I never knew the exact truth about this incident but I know that for a good long time there was a coolness between Picasso and Rivera. I am sure that if Rivera finally bade farewell to cubism, and later to France, it was to free himself once and for all from Picasso and his influence. He did not wish to follow in the great Spaniard's wake; his immense pride would not permit it to be said: "Rivera's style is Picasso's"; "Rivera is influenced by Picasso."

There was a time when a whole troupe of young French painters assembled round Diego, and he thought of forming from them a "Cézanne" school; it was in this way that I met with him Metzinger, Favorit (who was gassed in the war and died later in hospital), Duret, Fournier, Cornaud, Lhôte, Marie Blanchard. . . Some years later, however, Rivera told me:

"None of those painters is fit to be called a pupil of Cézanne. It'll be Soutine who succeeds to his place, you'll see – after Modigliani: he's a great artist."

I remember, in fact, that Rivera's friend Dr Faure was afterwards to write two books, one on Rivera himself and the other on Soutine. Dr Faure could see in those two very different men the same passion, a single true love: painting.

WHEN I GAVE UP CUBISM FOR POINTILLISM I DID NOT LISTEN to Rivera's advice, for he recommended me not to spend too long on Seurat's form of impressionism. I was then beset by memories of the Caucasus, by visions of its mosaics, tapestries and frescoes – so much so that for some years I kept to the same manner, though often discontented and discouraged at not managing to do more and better work. By persistence I managed to endow my subjects and my landscapes with transparence, volume, relief: I took care, also, that my pictures should be properly composed. Certain friends of mine said that I was wasting my time in persisting in this style which sooner or later would be outmoded; but I thought that neither period nor fashion counts for anything if only the work is beautiful; and that I still believe: only amateurs of painting are no longer what they once were: what they want now are canvases signed by great Old Masters, or ultra-modern painting.

Old Fénéon liked what I was doing. Signac had written me a letter of introduction to him; I had read it, and it said, among other things: "My dear Félix, I believe that if it had been possible for Seurat to see the water-colours and certain oil-paintings by Marevna he would have been charmed by the freshness and vigour of her art." I am very sorry that I left the letter with Fénéon.

If I am asked why I held aloof from the circle of contemporary artists who have all achieved universal recognition, my answer is that my exhibitions were always followed by long blanks, because I had to fight fearfully hard to bring up my child, devote much time to commercial art and to decorative art, and give up exhibiting for lack of money. By force of circumstances, then, I exhibited very seldom; but each exhibition of mine was, for the public and the critics, a new proof of my sincerity and of my love of painting and of life, if only because I had chosen an extremely difficult *genre* which not everyone liked.

After the deaths of Gustave Kahn and his wife, Zamaron remained faithful to me, and it was he who helped me to have an exhibition in Paris in Zborowski's brother's. He encouraged me to persevere with impressionism, and often said I ought to see someone or other; but I was repelled by the way in which picture-dealers and collectors tried to treat me. I wished to work and to have no contact with traders whose first enquiry was how many pictures a month one painted: and when one told them they said it was not enough; or who said that one must manufacture very pretty women and children, or something of the

sort. To say nothing of their attempts to paw you into the bargain, if you were a woman, and their suggestion you should go to bed with them. I could not stand such cynical coarseness: I never would see again a swine who, after buying a picture, thought he had paid enough for it to have the woman who had painted it thrown in. Every form of art has its thorns, especially if the artist is a woman. I remember a collector who told me it was a pity I was so ill-natured and that this prevented my understanding that when gallant proposals were made to me it was to pay honour to my beauty and to show that I was desirable. But really, when a woman painter takes her pictures to be sold it is a collector of canvases that she is looking for, not a connoisseur of female charms! Being a woman and a painter does not mean that one is a whore. I certainly made a bad start, and I was never to be in touch with buyers – I always found them repulsive; and of course I was ill-natured, because I wanted to be respected, as an artist and as a woman.

This is what happened to me with one collector. Zamaron recommended me one day to a friend of his, who was a bit mad, he warned me, but a good fellow; and he telephoned to this friend in my presence, a Monsieur W., a rich diamond-merchant, and told him I should be calling on him. "A young Russian artist, very talented and deserving; she is worth encouraging," the kind Zamaron added. So, full of hope, I took some canvases and set off for the faubourg St-Honoré. I stopped before a fine building with a substantial look, a real rich man's house. Monsieur W. opened the door to me himself and let me in with a genial, prepossessing smile. Since he was rather young and attractive I felt at once that he liked me very much. He chose from among my canvases a little pointillist oil-painting (a self-portrait) and asked the price. Zamaron had warned me to ask good prices and I suggested 800 francs. He thought the price pretty high, but since he liked the picture he did not bargain; on the contrary, he suggested making it a round sum by taking a drawing for 200 francs. I was delighted. "Have you any more canvases at home that I could see?" he asked good-naturedly. Suddenly he passed his hands over the lower part of my back, exclaiming that I had a beautiful, rounded, firm behind such as he loved. "My friend's is flat and gaunt: horrible. And your chest? Let's have a look." And unceremoniously he had a look down my blouse. I was scared and stepped back, but he caught me and put his arms round me. Then I pushed him away as hard as I could, whereat I dropped all my canvases on the ground, one on top of the other. We

both hurried to pick them up at the same moment and our heads collided with a thump. He raised his aching head and gave a stupid laugh: "Oh, these Russian women: they always stagger me!" (I told myself that if he had already known Russian women he was going to know one more – and how!) When the pictures had been picked up I darted towards the door-handle, to get off his premises as quickly as possible and seek refuge from this too amorous buyer; but he barred my way, stood in front of me, unbuttoned his trousers and exhibited himself – to tempt me, of course! Zamaron's warning was only too well founded: his friend ought to have been locked up. I could only laugh and, barging my way through, I left him in that ridiculous and humiliating posture, desperately repeating: "Malicious, wicked creature. I shall come and see you. I shall find you." "Come, do come," I shouted as I tore down the stairs as fast as my legs would carry me, glad to escape so easily from the madman, and telling myself that if he had the audacity to come to my place I would know how to pay him out.

I lived with my little daughter in a fine studio in the rue Decrès on the fourth floor of a new building. It was six o'clock next evening, and already pitch-dark out of doors, when the inevitable happened. My mad admirer knocked at the door and came in, looking haggard, without waiting for a reply. Fortunately Marika, who was eight at this time, was visiting my Chilean neighbour on the floor below, and my whole being could be concentrated to meet the attack. He literally hurled himself at me, his face congested, determined to attain his goal: we began a desperate, wordless struggle. Clenching my teeth I assembled all my strength to vanquish this man, frenzied with lust, who was trying to tear my frock and satiate his infatuated desire. The silence was broken only by our panting and the grinding of W.'s teeth. Suddenly I suggested that he should undress, in order to have greater freedom of movement, and, still raving, he began to throw his clothes about, tie, waistcoat, trousers and, finally, his long, lavender and grey striped silk drawers fell at his feet, leaving him in his shirt.

"Go on, Monsieur W., go on," I encouraged him to undress completely – then he impetuously took off his shirt and was left with a broad band of flannel as his only covering, which swaddled his belly.

"I beg your pardon," he said, rather embarrassed: "I am subject to hepatic colic"; then he reluctantly unrolled his stomach. "There," he said, "I'm as defenceless as a naked child. I hope that's how you like me."

"Not bad," I said with a downright, critical air: "forgive my artist's pretensions, but yesterday I could not appreciate the full extent of your charms, having seen only a small part of you: now I recognize your perfections. Monsieur W., you are a very handsome fellow; but dress quickly: you'll catch cold – think of your colic – and my daughter may come back at any moment." Furious and trembling with cold and humiliation W. dressed, muttering between his teeth incoherent remarks directed at me. "She's mad, mad, mad. A monster. To do this to me. Me! I who would have bought her pictures without haggling. It's revolting!" He was near weeping, embarrassed, ashamed. I helped him on with his overcoat, then I patted him on the shoulder and said:

"You see, Monsieur W., you're a good-looking man and perhaps a good one, but too much money and a bad education have completely warped you. You have no tact, and have never tried to have any. Zamaron guaranteed your taste for painting; but it is not beautiful pictures that you are fond of: it's beautiful, easy girls. I came to your place completely trustfully, to sell my work, not my charms. If you had behaved differently we might have remained good friends; but now, perhaps because you've met another real Russian woman, it's goodbye."

He went away, running like a madman. Some days later I saw Zamaron again, who asked me with a laugh what had passed between myself and W., who had rung him up and raged against everything Russian. I told him the whole story, and he was much amused; and I said that I hoped that his friend would be good after his experience. Whereupon Zamaron described to me the passion of Nura, a young Russian painter, who was mad about W.: she spent hours waiting for him in his office, and he would get away by another door and avoid this too loving woman he was sick of. Poor Nura.

"Little Marevna," said Zamaron, "one must know men and know how to take them."

"What by?" I asked, furious and disturbed. "By the . . . ?"

"Sometimes, perhaps," he replied. "You're too proud, Marevna; you've too little worldly wisdom. You must learn."

"But what's the good of painting good pictures," I cried, in despair, "if I must sell myself with them? No, no! I refuse."

Later on Zamaron recommended me to two brothers, diamond-cutters, who were also very rich, but normal, and better brought up.

They bought two of my pictures and told me that everyone knew about my adventure with W.

"You were cruel to our poor friend: a pity, because he always speaks ill of you since that sad business, but he likes your painting."

I said I should never go and see the cad again.

"But after all, Marevna, it's not his fault. He was paying you a compliment. He'd been struck by lightning."

"No," I said: "if I had been a client come to buy a diamond, Monsieur W. would certainly not have lost his senses after that flash of lightning. I'm not sorry for my severity, and you may tell him so. *Au revoir, messieurs.*"

I do not believe that they really understood.

I retreated into myself and avoided contact with people who sickened me of life. I know, of course, that to succeed at any price one must endure the sickness, bow and scrape, bend one's neck to the yoke. Or one must happen on a friend, a real friend, rich and reliable, to help one clear a path, to protect one and enable one to develop one's talent. But this is a question of luck.

All my life, unfortunately, money has come between me and my work. In order to paint, a woman must enjoy a certain security, even if she has only quite a small family to support. For a man the problem is easier to solve: he nearly always has a woman, wife or mistress, who earns money: she works for "her man". She is devoted, and sacrifices herself until the man becomes celebrated. She is capable of every sort of self-denial: she tries to sell his pictures by seducing a client; she will even go to any length, with the sole object of making "her man" a celebrity. Then, when the pictures begin to sell, she begins to dress a bit better; but it's hard on those who are worn out, have aged and lost their bloom: like old brushes that are thrown into the dustbin they see themselves replaced one day by an elegant young woman who will make a fine model for nudes. Heaven knows how many cases of this sort I have seen in my life – how many artists cast aside their old, ailing, worn-out woman who was their devoted, faithful comrade in the times of poverty and discouragement.

No: a woman artist is far from having the luck of a man; and especially a decent, unattached woman who prides herself on having a child of her own and in wishing to bring it up to be good and honest. A male artist can more easily live for his art alone: he is not bothered by questions of *duty*, as a conventional man is – or a woman. The man

who is building a career will take duty and prejudice in his stride: he will always be forgiven, especially if later on he becomes a lion. The man who has achieved fame must seek in his heart and conscience for excuses for his past meanness and dishonesty; and sometimes, perhaps, he will find the strength to correct his faults.

22

LET ME GO BACK AND SPEAK AGAIN OF OUR LIFE AT MONT-PARNASSE. Rivera's studio, as I have said already, was in those years from 1916 to 1918 a meeting-place for artists and intellectuals. I, with Ehrenburg or Voloshin, was more and more frequently attracted to his society; at the same time our friendship, his, his wife's and mine, became established. Out of pure comradeship Rivera would now and again slip me a fifteen- or twenty-franc note, when he saw that I had no money. (He was not the only one, either: my other friends also helped me not to fall into black destitution, and I am most warmly grateful to them all. Several times, before the revolution, Yura sent me money from Russia, which I used to buy painting materials.) When I knew them Rivera's Angelina was more than thirty-five, some years older than he and twelve years my senior. They had no children. I was truly very much alone, surrounded by those artists who all, except Voloshin, had a man or woman for a companion. Naturally a good many requests were made to me, but I always shunned them. (My first experience, indeed, had filled me with bitterness, and I mistrusted men more than ever.) Angelina often asked me why I did not become engaged to one of their friends, the sculptor Meshchaninov, a short, broad man with a round, red face, who thought rather well of himself. He paid court to me and Rivera urged me to accept him:

"He's a very good chap: he'd be an excellent friend to you, you know, and he's very fond of you."

Unfortunately I did not like him at all, nor his sculpture, either; but I was often teased about this aspirant. Sometimes at Rivera's I got fed up with it and would take refuge under the table, where I was

hidden by the cloth. Rivera would come on all fours to my hiding-place and find me, and we would stay there, talking away in peace until Angelina lifted the table-cloth and handed us a lighted candle, saying it would be easier like that – “In darkness one can’t see what one’s doing properly.” Then everyone roared with laughter and we both came out from under the table, innocent and smiling.

To tell the truth something about Rivera began to disturb me. He was a regular child, erratic, spoilt, sensitive, excitable, but at the same time he behaved very honourably towards Angelina and me. When I looked round me, out of all those men – leaving out Picasso, who was handsome and stood out from them all – it was Rivera I liked most, in spite of his flat feet, his great belly and his slovenly dress. I looked at his superb Saracen’s head, with the prominent eyes that sometimes burst into flame; the way he had of turning pale and then red; his nose, aquiline in profile and somewhat fleshy from in front; his wide mouth with teeth set rather far apart but very white. He wore a moustache and a short beard which covered the lower part of his face. He had beautiful hands, small for his great, vigorous body. When he began to speak everybody listened, not only for what he said but for his way of speaking: his hearers hung on his lips.

He had one surprising trait, which made him respected and avoided at the same time: this was what might be called fits of “lunacy”. I still remember the first time I was present at one of those fits: he suddenly stopped talking, he turned white, his features were motionless, his black, rather protruding eyes showed only their whites. Everyone fell silent and watched him. He rose, took up his great Mexican stick (he always found it, wherever it was, in cases like this) and went towards the door. This was what always happened: if Angelina tried to stop him by talking nicely to him he put her aside, opened the door and went down into the street, without being balked by the complete darkness on the stairs. Of course everybody followed him, but at a good distance. For my part I was distressed every time at witnessing this spectacle: I had never seen anything like it. The first time I wanted to say good-bye to my friends and go back to the rue Asseline; but as soon as he was in one of those fits Rivera would not let me go. He accompanied me home and declared that he would allow no one to enter my door. I was very glad to find myself alone, and I think I remember that, once I got in, I locked my door for the first time. I did not go to see him till several days later.

Angelina explained that he must not be thwarted, but treated very gently. If one behaved like this one might sometimes manage to persuade him to go to bed. She told me that he suffered from these fits regularly every month, and the more tired he was the oftener the fits recurred. They were probably due to his liver, she said, which was in a very bad state. I soon realized that he required much care and attention, and I felt sorry for Angelina, since I knew that for ten years already she had lived with this creature who was like a child when he was not well. (I have noticed that in general men put up with illness very badly, while women, condemned to the discomforts which start at puberty, can put up with any illness with greater stoicism and patience.)

And now, in addition to my admiration for the artist, pity was growing in me for the man.

Angelina talked to me of her husband's weakness for women. (I thought he really was her lawful husband.) She laughed as she added:

"Oh, I'm not afraid of these women: they're usually very stupid; they're flirts who like to see everyone at their feet. He very soon tires of them. I shut my eyes and he always comes back to me in the end." Was she thinking of me as she said that? I do not believe so. I was not after Rivera at that moment: on the contrary, I made a point of avoiding him and never went to his house alone.

Angelina came to show more confidence in me. One evening, when we were at their house, Ehrenburg, Picasso and I, and I had a cold, I had used the time – which went very quickly – to make a sketch of Rivera sitting astride his chair, and of Picasso, who was in an armchair by the table, while Ehrenburg was sitting beside me. When my two friends made ready to go Rivera said:

"Marevnochka has a very bad cold. She'd much better stay here: I know there's no fire in her studio. She can sleep behind the screen."

So Ehrenburg and Picasso went off by themselves and I stayed. They made up a fine, clean bed for me on the sofa and put up the screen; then I went to bed. I did not sleep for long, and suddenly I heard Rivera rambling. They were both in bed on their side of the screen and it seemed to me that in the darkness of the huge studio I was hearing someone else speaking, not Rivera nor Angelina. Someone was mourning in a mixture of Spanish, French and Russian, while

Angelina seemed to be trying gently to restrain him. I realized that Diego was determined to leave their bed and go away, and that she was holding him back and trying to pacify him.

"I love Marevna: do you see? I love her and I can't help it. It's you who must tell her: I shall never be able to."

"Yes, yes," answered Angelina. "Don't be uneasy: she shall be told; but now go to sleep or you'll wake her up and she'll be alarmed. . . . Sleep, *muchachito*. . . ."

My heart was throbbing in my chest; what I had taken for nonsense and innocent games was true, then? Or was he joking in order to test me? Was it the rambling of a sick man? And, if so, was what he said valid?

In the morning Rivera went downstairs for the bread and the milk. I wanted to go away, but they both insisted that I should stay. I had a headache, my ears hurt and I was shivering. I had influenza.

"You're not going away in that state, Marevna. Look, Angelina: she's ill. She must go to bed at once."

They put me in the back room, and I had hardly got into bed than I began twitching about like a fish in a frying-pan. I was devoured by fever. They tried to light the stove and it smoked like a factory chimney. I was suffocated, I wept and coughed. They had to open the window and make a through draught. Rivera wrapped me in blankets and carried me in his arms into the studio.

"We must wait till the smoke goes away," he said. "You must be careful not to fall really ill, Marevnochka. You should stay here until you get well. I won't hear of your being alone at your place at a time like this."

I said nothing. Each word of his went straight to my heart. In the giddiness of fever I felt very happy, gathered in the arms of this kind giant, the "kindly cannibal", as Ehrenburg always called him. At that moment I cared for nothing: I was doing nothing wrong; I was ill: I was loved: someone was sorry for lonely, fragile me, lost in the icy wilderness of Paris without an ounce of coal because of the war that went on and on and made everybody suffer, most of all artists, children and old people.

I spent several days in bed in the little room. Angelina was a good friend and looked after me. In the evenings Rivera came and sat on the edge of my bed and looked at me. I thought Angelina must be hurt by her husband's incoherent talk which amounted to so many admis-

sions. She would ask me next day whether I had slept well and whether I had heard anything: Diego had had a mild attack. I answered that I was much too feverish and that I could hear nothing but the buzzing in my ears.

I had hardly recovered when I left, vowing to myself to see Diego as little as possible: for what could it lead to? In the course of the days that I spent with them his wife had confessed to me that she was pregnant, which was one reason for my avoiding the studio in the rue du Départ, yet there was nothing specially cheering in this idea. I had got a taste for these visits to Rivera and his wife, and I felt very happy in the atmosphere of work and peace that surrounded them.

I worked in my icy studio. The coal allotted to artists by the government (fifty kilogrammes a month) soon vanished; the studio was vast and the walls were nearly all glass. Fortunately I saw Ehrenburg, Katya, Voloshin and Savinkov, and they helped to drive the blues away. Montparnasse was already talking of Rivera's new craze, and my friends teased me.

"He's ugly, Rivera, and dirty," they said.

"Not more than Ehrenburg," I retorted.

Later on, in an issue of the *Cri de Paris*, Marcel Rivière had written of Ilya: ". . . this dirty, lousy, Jewish poet who calls himself a Russian. . . ." I went to the Dôme to find the journalist and squirted his face with a siphon – "for the lousy Jew". That did not stop me doing the same by Ilya when he said to me: "Your questionable Mexican. . . ." Perhaps this came from an old grudge, or a kind of contempt for me. Nevertheless he afterwards did all he could to bring us together.

Voloshin, Savinkov, Ilya and I once went to a gay and lively evening at the S.s', just at the time when Diaghlev's Russian Ballet was performing in Paris. Rivera was there, and the handsome Massine and brilliant Max Jacob. Rivera drew me into another room and made me drink, as he did, from a goblet of champagne in which he had mingled drops of our blood – an Indian rite, he said, which would bind us together for years – for eternity. We emptied the goblet, gazing into each other's eyes: was it a joke, or a real charm?

Voloshin came in, saw us holding the goblet and kissing and insisted on drinking some Mexican blood mixed with his own Russo-German. He said he had never drunk blood except when he had cut his finger and sucked it. They performed the same rite, and suddenly we all fell silent: perhaps we had fallen under the spell of Rivera, sorcerer or

priest. Back in the drawing room we refused to say what we had been doing, although we were told we looked quite blissful. They noticed, too, that Diego, Voloshin and I now called each other "tu".

"They've obviously drunk a love-philtre," said Ehrenburg.

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ANGELINA WAS NOW GOING OUT LESS AND LESS. HER FIRST pregnancy, coming late, caused her a lot of suffering. Diego would come out in the evening with the rest of us, to the café or to the Zetlins', or perhaps to the Russian Ballet, which he was mad about; and here I must avow my penitence: I was caught up in a dangerous game and, instead of avoiding Rivera because of his wife's pregnancy, I allowed myself to come closer and closer to the man who frightened and fascinated me.

It is a fact that Diaghilev's Russian Ballet played an important part in the artistic life of Paris. Talented artists, like Goncharova and her husband Larionov, painted scenery for them; and Leon Bakst designed the uninspired *décor* for *Shéhérazade*; but Picasso afterwards did the cubist *décor* for *Parade* which unleashed simultaneously the enthusiasm and the protests of the critics.

As for Diego and me there was nothing between us yet though all Montparnasse, as I have said, was talking of our affair, criticizing us and pitying his wife. Max and Ilya asked me openly whether I was in love with "the kindly cannibal", and Boris Savinkov, before he left for Russia asked us both to dinner in a small restaurant: he was determined to know the truth at any price, and he watched us with his sly, little, glittering, eyes.

"I shall soon be returning to Paris, and I hope to see you again, Marya Bronislavovna," he said, "and to find you married, and wearing lovely, long frocks, and hats and jewels. Would you like to have children?"

And again, as he was leaving:

"Go on being good: always be good; be the delicious child that you are today. But stop whistling in the street."

When he asked me whether Rivera was my lover, I answered with spirit: "Have you lost your head? His wife is pregnant."

"You really are comic," he replied, "quite comic and adorable! But don't trust cannibals, even kindly ones."

Rivera sometimes came and surprised me as I was working in my studio: he gave me very good advice and talked to me of classical and modern painting. Sometimes, too, we went to the Louvre or to exhibitions, to see artists we knew; or he would take me home with him, where his wife was altering her old frocks and getting ready baby-linen.

One day, when she had been asked out with Diego, I don't remember what or where to, and had no suitable clothes, I urged her to ask Diego for a hundred and fifty francs to buy an evening dress that would disguise her figure and be becoming to her. Diego gave her the money although he was not flush at that moment. Angelina and I went to buy a frock, a hat and some shoes; but I could not go to the evening party with them, for I had nothing presentable myself. Diego went reluctantly: Angelina had not been able to restrain her annoyance that day and had declared:

"Yes, you're always going out with other people, and you enjoy that: you don't have to be asked twice; but you don't care to go out with me any more!"

She was on the verge of tears: of course her condition excused her being nervy and unfair. I often said to him:

"Go and find your wife: it's not right to leave her alone like this."

"Then you come too," he would say. "It's not my fault that she's pregnant. It wasn't I who wanted it."

I could not help laughing: this sort of answer was so childish, so typical of masculine blindness; but it irritated me, the way he had of casting all responsibility on his wife. Had it not taken two of them to make a child? I have since understood that men always say that when they want to evade their responsibilities to the wife and the child — when they do not go even further and say the child is not theirs, if they are not married to the mother. And I understood, too, why my father was so anxious to see me married: he knew what to think of the selfishness and meanness of the male.

I did not go with Max Voloshin when he left to join his mother in the Crimea. Diego and I saw him off, and Voloshin said, seriously, to

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Diego: "I entrust her to you. We are brothers by the blood we drank together: she is your sister. Protect her from harm." Rivera promised: was he really thinking what he was saying?

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VOLOSHIN'S DEPARTURE LEFT A GREAT GAP; NOW THAT HE was no longer there, and that Savinkov had gone too, we still had one friend: Ilya. One day I saw him arrive at my door, all tousled and trembling.

"Listen. Marevna," he said. "Last night Diego came to my hotel stark raving. It's a wonder he didn't try to kill me with his Mexican stick: he whirled it round my head shouting that he wanted you at any price. . . . I swear he's losing his wits. What is there between you?"

I answered that there was nothing: it was one of Diego's usual fits which would go off as it had come on.

"No, you idiot. It can't possibly pass off like that. Here: here's the letter he's just left for me: read it, and you'll see what's up."

It was a long letter and I did no more than glance through it:

Dear Ilya,

I love Marevna and Angelina knows. I've told her several times. My life is a burden to me now. I can't stand living with my wife any longer - she's not my wife, anyhow. The child she is expecting is a misfortune that I never wished for. She did it on purpose in order to keep me. But I don't love her any more. I have a great affection for her, for she has always been a good friend to me, but that's all. Talk to Marevna. This can't go on. She must go away, or she must stay here and belong to me . . . etc., etc. Angelina agrees to our separating . . . and so on, all in the same vein.

"You see what you've done?" said Ilya.

"I? I've done nothing at all. I've done everything I could to stop its coming to this. I like him very much, but . . . just when his wife's expecting a baby? It'd be monstrous. I'm beginning to believe he is

mad, as you say. Or perhaps he just needs a woman, since he can't make love to his wife, who's soon going to lie in. He's only got to look: it wouldn't take him long to find one."

"No, no! Listen, Marevna. Do you want to experience a great love – you, who are so romantic and so fastidious about men? Well, here is your opportunity: a grand adventure. All you need is the courage to live it. You'd be a fool to refuse."

"What will be the end of it?"

"How do you expect me to guess that? It depends on many things, doesn't it? Anyhow you must make up your mind quickly. I wouldn't spend another night like that for anything. If he doesn't knock me on the head I shall go mad too. Come on: be brave. One doesn't often have the chance of such a love. And to tell the truth your Diego hasn't such bad taste," he added, smiling at me ironically.

He left me the letter and I lay down on my bed, seriously, honestly wondering whether I wanted love from Rivera. Clearly he was fond of me and interested in my work, and I felt strongly drawn towards this odd man in whom were united the power of genius and the weakness of a child; but I did not know whether I loved him as Angelina did, with the same self-abnegation and patience. I did not know whether I could make him happy: my first reverse had left its mark and I still felt a real aversion for physical possession. Passion was transitory, and what I wanted was tenderness and affection. I knew that Diego had many adventures, but he always went back to his wife.

He had not spoken to me himself. Doubtless he could not have found words to convince me of the sincerity of his devotion; and then there was this baby, a cruel problem. Angelina's pride would be deeply wounded if she saw herself threatened with abandonment at the very moment when she should feel herself bound more closely than ever to her child's father. And myself? It was as though I had defrauded her of Diego, profited by their kindness, in a sense betrayed the friendship and love of both of them.

To tell the truth I was too young, and the word "love" still had for me a halo of poetry. Certainly, to look at him, there was nothing really poetic about Rivera, apart from his face. He neglected himself, cared little how he looked, often had a dirty neck, and emitted a smell peculiar to fat people. (I often wondered where this came from. While our relationship was still only that of friends he often took me on to his knees, and I breathed in the odour of his hair and beard, of his chest,

too, a mixture of musk, turpentine and linseed oil, and I did not find this unpleasant. But another odour was mingled with it which repelled me and took away all the pleasure of staying in that position. Of course men must sometimes avoid a woman because of too strong a smell. Love may tolerate this kind of thing, but desire, I believe, cannot endure it.)

Of course I wanted Rivera to like me, but I lived and dressed very simply and made no effort that he should. There was a time when I had worn out all my frocks during the war and had not one left to wear; so I wore a pair of pyjamas hand-woven by Fujita, who had made me a present of them. I rolled up the trousers in order that no one should see them under my overcoat, and on my head I wore a great Caucasian chamois-skin *bashlyk* folded like a turban. Could anything be simpler? In the course of time I had nothing but one black frock: but to sustain me – I was young, and there was my desire to live and to be happy and to make others so. I was gay, impulsive, lively, shy (but sometimes audacious), a good comrade, obliging and at the same time proud and plain-spoken. Doubtless this mixture had its charm – when backed by youthfulness.

What was I to say to Diego, then, if he came to talk to me himself about his being in love? My answer was: Be honest and sincere, if possible. In fact towards evening I heard his heavy step on the stair. As soon as I opened the door I was struck by his distorted, tormented face, his feverish, mournful eyes. He put down his hat and his great stick, and sat on my bed, gazing at me in silence. I asked him whether he was ill or annoyed by something.

"Annoyed is the word," he replied. "I'm sick of Roser's org and his demands. He wants a contract with me, but he's not offering enough money and he's asking for too many pictures."

I pointed out to him that a contract would be a sure way of getting him launched: it was always to the interest of every dealer to puff his nurslings.

"Look at Picasso, and the speed of his rise," I ended.

"I've no desire to work; I'm disgusted with everything. There's something missing – impetus – something."

It was painful to look at him. I should have liked to give him, as usual, an innocent, affectionate kiss, but I told myself that I should be **risking** being caught up in other feelings: I wanted to go on struggling, **resisting**, for my own sake or for his. I determined that if he went away

without saying anything I should not breathe a word about Ilya's call either.

All of a sudden he caught sight of the letter, which I had inadvertently left on the table. He took it, crumpled it up and stuffed it in his pocket.

"Ilya's been to see you, then. He's spoken to you? You've nothing to say?"

"Listen, Diego," I answered. "Pay attention. Do you think it's very honourable of us to play at love at this time, when from one day to another your wife is expecting a baby – a child of *yours*? I don't feel very comfortable about it: my conscience tells me that it wouldn't be very nice to strike her such a blow at the very moment when she needs you so. Later on, perhaps."

"She has all my friendship and affection," he replied, "but it is you I love. And she knows that now, Marevna: I've told her everything. I've been fighting against myself for a long time, but I can't go on. If you had gone to Russia, I should have left here, too. If I let myself be tied down by Paul Rosenberg it's solely in order to secure myself a position in the world – and for her and you – because I want to help both of you. But I must be free in my private life. I told Angelina I wanted to be free – to live with you. Do you want me?"

"Remember Max's words: 'Protect her from harm.' Here you are trying to drag me into an adventure that I can't see the end of properly."

"Don't think that, Marevna. I'm not a cad or a gigolo. I'm just as much of a nobleman as your little prince from Tiflis, if not more so. Would you like to see my papers? You'll see that I've a title: my father and grandfather were grandees of Spain."

"Well? I'm not interested in that: where would that lead us?"

"What are you interested in, then? I'm not rich, but that'll come: you'll see. If I offer you my love, sincerely, honourably, it is because . . . for a long time I've kept nothing from Angelina, and because I believe you love me too. Would you like me to marry you tomorrow? It's the simplest thing and it's quite feasible."

I told myself that this must be a trap, a test he was putting me to, asking me such a question when perhaps his wife was feeling the first pains. I thought that a man would soon despise a woman who accepted such a proposal and took advantage of his weakness, and even more of his hysteria. For the moment his conscience was utterly blinded and

suffocated by passion – but later? Did he really think I should answer: “All right, then: let’s marry”? Or was he convinced of my integrity, and simply risking everything on one throw? I wished I could see through to his true feelings, his real nature.

He looked at me with his eyes full of tears:

“For me to be able to hurt so much a woman who will soon give birth to a child, a child of mine, Marevna, must I not truly love you?”

“Are you sure that it’s not only that you believe you love me? – and after some time you’ll be fed up with me because I’ve lent myself to this lie and shared with you in the betrayal of that woman?”

“Oh, you’re so obstinate. Listen, and try to understand this: she agrees herself that I should live with you. You and I, Marevnochka, d’you understand? You’ll come and live in my studio. She’ll stay in the apartment, which I shall hand over to her and the child. And if you don’t want the two of us to stay there, well, we’ll go and live somewhere else. I’ll go now. think it over fully. I’ll do what you want; but come and see Angelina one of these days: she’ll tell you herself she’s willing to separate from me. She’s kind and intelligent. . . .”

He kissed my hand and went away.

Poor “kindly cannibal” – and poor little “sea-princess”. I was sorry for him: he was so weak; yet at the same time I despised him for his cruelty towards a wife who was aging. She was older than he, as I have said, and there comes a time when this discrepancy begins to count. He had met her years before when she had the nordic freshness of her twenty-five years, and he was hardly twenty. I believe he had not much money then; she belonged to the best Tsarist society and was receiving an allowance from her father. At twenty-five she cannot have been ugly, in spite of her pointed nose and red cheeks. She had kept her slimness and her passion for extraordinary hats which she made herself. To me she always looked like a kind of bird, a little parakeet, and sometimes she screamed with rage like a parakeet too. I could not understand her letting her Diego Diegovich go like this and I told myself that this intelligent woman, who looked so frail but was endowed with uncommon strength of mind, was nonetheless staking everything she had. She was relying on her baby: if it should be a boy Diego would not be able to desert it, for he would have an heir to bear his name and carry on his line. . . .

I talked to myself like this, *à la* Dostoyevsky, in my studio, and

would have liked to be strong too, and not throw myself with my eyes shut into a game in which my part would not be entirely to my advantage. . . . If I really loved Diego it would be better to put up with any affront, and remain unmarried; marriage was for Angelina, if she should ask it for the child's sake. If she wished to have the best part and to act the victim in the eyes of the world, then I, too, would play fair and be kind, and not take advantage of the weakness and insensate passion of the "kindly cannibal".

I determined to talk the whole thing over again with Ilya, in order to dally over my answer, hoping (in spite of myself, I will admit) that perhaps it was only a passing attack, and even that I should not see Rivera again.

Ilya told me I was an idiot. Life was short enough without deliberately adding complications. "It will all work out: the baby will be born, Angelina will stay, but you will have the right to all Diego's love. All that signifies is whether you love him or not." In short, he was urging me to throw myself into his friend's arms – not without a sadistic curiosity about what would come of it all.

Diego came running to see me next day, having just had Angelina taken to a nuns' clinic, for she was not feeling well. He asked me to go back to his studio and have a picnic lunch with him: we were not to talk about ourselves.

"In a day or two you shall go and see Angelina: she'll tell you everything, and after that we shall be free!"

We went to the rue du Départ and found the apartment all upside down – socks with holes in them scattered everywhere and dirty underwear of Diego's that he did not manage to hide under the bed in time. There were some very fine pictures and I asked him whether one day he would give me one of his canvases as a present – quite a little one.

"Anything you want," he cried.

He was in the kitchen making *riz à la mexicaine* – quantities of rice and lots of olive oil. It smelled of fried garlic, onions and pepper. He was very gay and I burst out laughing myself when I saw him screw up a corner of his handkerchief and tickle deep inside his nostrils, one after the other, sneezing violently each time, and explaining:

"It clears my brain, which has been blocked for some time, and it brightens one's ideas."

We talked desultorily, in order not to be left with nothing to say. The rice was splendid, and so were our appetites. Then a moment came

when Rivera lifted me up and led me towards a big armchair. He sat down and put me on his knee. I had liked this very much in the past: like a good, trustful little girl I had sat on the knees of Gorki, Voloshin and Diego . . . but now I had become someone else, and I was scared — though heaven knows there was nothing immodest about us: Diego did not dare to lay a hand on me and we stayed for a good time without moving. Then:

"Comfortable, Marevna?" he asked. He turned his face to me and I saw that his eyes were full of tears.

"Yes, quite. Very, in fact."

What would I not have given if we could have had a bath before anything else? How could I tell this great child that in order to win a "tigress's" love one must be cleaner? I remembered Katya, when we were at Èze and Ilya was going in to Nice, giving "her man" clean underclothes and shouting to him to clean his teeth — "Your breath stinks, Ilya!" Though it is true she was no longer his wife — or hardly.

An idea came to me.

"I've got rheumatism, Diego: I need to go to the hot baths. Will you come with me? We could go together and you could have a bath too. It would be a way of washing off all the old dust. We'd be brand-new."

He agreed, but I asked him to put on clean linen, too, and to change his trousers.

"I haven't any others," he said.

"Then you must buy some. We'll see to that; and we can buy some shoes and underwear at the same time. I've seen the clothes drying in the kitchen: they're all in rags. It's not that it's very important, but I should like you to be a bit neater: you look like a tramp."

He grumbled, protesting that he would need all his money to pay for Angelina's lying-in, and that he was accustomed to doing without things.

"Oh, come," I said. "You're earning money: do you never buy anything?"

"I give everything I earn to Angelina and she does what she likes with it. . . . Look at my socks."

He showed me his socks with holes in them, fastened to his torn, long underwear with safety-pins. The deficiencies in his wardrobe could be made good: the essential thing at the moment was for him to be clean. I could not understand how Angelina could let her Diego

Diegovich neglect himself to such a degree, when she declared she cherished him like a child. (Perhaps there was this about it too: the cherished child did not lend itself so readily to the attentions of the nurse.)

25

THE DAYS PASSED AND WE GAILY SAVOURED OUR FREEDOM like good self-seekers. We made little purchases for Diego; we went to the Louvre; we walked along the embankments, or sometimes we took a small boat down the Seine towards St Cloud. We walked about holding hands; but I always went home to sleep. Then there was the Russian Ballet. We smuggled ourselves in nearly every evening: we would go in during the first interval, with no hat or overcoat, like good, respectable people who had gone out for some fresh air; but, once in, what passionate excitement! The whole gang of *avant-garde* painters was crowded together in a box. The enormous, hefty ones, like Rivera and Larionov, blocked the view, and the rest fought for places where they could see: I climbed onto a chair. I remember the evening when the curtain rose for the first time on *Parade*, with Picasso's *décor*: what an uproar there was! After the first moment of stupefaction when the public saw two figures appear whose costumes harmonized with the ultra-modern *décor* of the houses and the street, when the music fell silent and nothing was heard but the rhythmic beating of the dancer's feet in time to their movements, the silence was suddenly rent by the wild howls of part of the audience. In front of me two men had stood up and were exchanging blows – for Picasso'and against him! I joined in and, standing on my seat, began to bash the bald skull of the anti-Picasso man.

"Call off your daughter! Stop her hitting me!" yelled the bald man to his adversary.

"She's not my daughter, you disgusting fellow," retorted the other.

The police had to intervene to restore a little quiet in the auditorium;

meanwhile the dancers, unmoved, had continued their performance. After the first night of *Parade* the audience behaved better, and there was considerable applause; but the uproar was renewed at Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps* and at Nijinsky's audacious dancing in *L'après-midi d'un faune*. Nevertheless this did not prevent the public's quickly becoming used to the new style – in a good sense, for they entered into the spirit of the designers and dancers and accorded them proof of their success, which has always caused me great pleasure.

The days passed, I say – too quickly. One evening, when we had been to the cinema, Diego insisted that I should spend the night at his apartment. I pointed out that this was hardly advisable, from his point of view and that of his *concierge*.

"We must live for our own sakes, not for the *concierge*," he replied. "Life is too short and we've wasted too much precious time already. When I think of the years I've known you! . . . Come on: I won't hurt you."

I went back with him and we sat by the fire without any light. The moon gave us plenty of illumination.

Suddenly he said: "I want to see you naked by moonlight. I've never had the chance, like the others, of seeing you bathing in the sea. Do me this favour: I ask you in all humility."

He besought me so gently that I could not refuse. He unfastened my frock himself and I sat in an armchair, naked, bathed in the moonlight. Rivera sat in an armchair opposite me, with his back to the light, his hands and elbows resting on the arms. His eyes glowed in the half-darkness: "A werewolf," I thought.

"That's enough posing," I said at last. "I'm sleepy. . . . The moon is hypnotizing me. . . ."

"Don't go," he said. "Stay: don't be frightened. I'll be patient as long as you like, but stay."

We slept in separate beds. I was considerate of Angelina, saying to myself: "I am her guest here; she'll come back one day. I don't want to leave a shadow of evil behind me."

We lived like this for several days, getting used to each other's nakedness in all simplicity. We romped about, running round the table, wrestling, rolling on a bed, pushing each other about; but I got away nimbly each time I saw the great, dumb mouth open, as though the "ogre" was going to eat me up. I believe Rivera also enjoyed these games of ours. As a matter of fact these were the best of all the

moments that I spent living with Diego. Everything had been said: nothing consummated. We were veritable children.

* * *

Angelina had given birth to a son, and one day Diego asked me to go to see her: he would come later. My heart was beating as I went up to her room, but I could look her in the face: I had done nothing, and nothing was changed.

I found her resting; the room had been darkened, and as she lay in her bed she looked young again, pink and shining: all women shine like this when they have just had a baby. In a cot by her bedside there was a miniature Diego, red and wrinkled. I felt a pang, and could have wished the baby was mine: I loved him already, and only hoped that Angelina would let me help look after him.

"Good morning, Marevna," she said, and at the same moment Diego came in with a nun and two bouquets of flowers. One of them he put on Angelina's bed and the other he gave to me, and kissed my hand. His wife did not take her eyes off him, and he was so perturbed that he did not even look at his son.

Angelina called me to her side and said, with tears in her eyes:

"I know all about it, Marevna. Go with him if you love him. And be happy, both of you."

The tears streamed down her cheeks onto her white nightgown. I felt foolish and ashamed, and would have liked to be in her place: wasn't it the better of the two? I felt for her even more than before, and I should have liked to know whether Diego had the same feelings of shame and compassion as I had. He was pale and his features were twisted in the effort to smile, as they were whenever he was embarrassed or vexed. I wished I could tell him that it was all over, that I could not accept the sacrifice of Angelina; but the words would not leave my throat. I kissed Angelina and went away without a word to Diego. I fled, far away from that woman and "her man" whom she was so generously presenting to me. I threw away my splendid bouquet, for I thought it ridiculous. I heard a call behind me – Rivera's voice – but I ran on.

I did not go back to my studio, but to a café where I could hide and be alone and undisturbed. I would not go back to the rue du Départ, much though I desired to; and if I went home I should find Diego there. I believe that if I had had any money I should have gone away somewhere, anywhere. I stayed in the café till very late. It was near the

Gare Montparnasse, and was full of travellers, commonplace old couples, soldiers on leave with peroxided women, tradesmen, young people. At last I set off for my studio, slowly, looking on every side in case the "ogre" was lying in wait for me: I saw no one.

But I had hardly opened the door when I felt he was there. He was lying on the sofa waiting for me.

"Where have you been? Why did you go away, Marevna? You've left me alone all day: I thought I was going mad."

"Ah," I thought, "there's my great child. I love him, but as for depending on him to protect me and defend me from whatever it might be. . . . What we ought to do is to go away, far, far away; but alas! we are so poor."

26

WE BECAME LOVERS.

When Angelina came back to the apartment Diego told me that he and I would go and live in the studio. I did not care for the idea of having Angelina and the baby so close to us, and I was right, as I found out later on.

It was a hard winter. We were short of coal and I shivered in the enormous studio. One day Rivera came home with two presents for me. The first was a pair of little Siamese cats; the second was a parcel which made me blush hotly when I opened it: it contained a hygienic device in splendid, pink india-rubber.

"It's a very prosaic present, *milaya*," said Rivera.

Clearly he did not want any more children; but I told myself that very day: I shall have one too, and it shall be more beautiful than the other! Otherwise, what's the use? . . .

The little cats kept us warm at night but they soon fell ill because of the cold and in spite of all my care they died one after the other. I was greatly grieved.

Our life became orderly. I painted, like Diego, in the studio or in the little room behind; sometimes we ate together, sometimes he ate

with Angelina. I could feel the hostility of some of Rivera's friends. I did not set foot in the S.s' house again: Madame was furious at my conduct and now invited only Diego and Angelina, though Diego sometimes accompanied Angelina only "reluctantly", he told me. On those evenings the baby was left alone, and Marie Blanchard came to look after him. She was a painter of mixed Polish, Spanish and French blood, with a hump on her back and in front; with her bony face, long nose and piercing eyes she looked like a witch. She had pretty feet and a pretty talent: among the women artists she was thought to be one of the most gifted. She was very fond of Rivera, and he often told me with a laugh that it depended only on him whether he had a child by Marie: she was longing for it.

"Why don't you do it then? I'm sure she'd bring it up admirably."

"I'm not so sure," he answered. "It's myself she loves. She'd like to go to bed with me, if only once. But I feel quite incapable of it."

She was an old friend of Diego's and Angelina's and had known them in Spain. She did not like me: she was jealous.

I sometimes used to go up and see the baby, and now I was pestered by the idea of having one of my own. I was twenty-five and with Diego I had learned the keen joy of being really a woman; and my maternal instinct had been roused together with my senses.

"Think of your painting and the splendid career that's waiting for you," said Diego. "You're madly gifted; you can be a good painter. There's nothing to stop you loving my child as if he were your own."

But Angelina did not see things in the same way. It did not take me long to realize that she found my presence undesirable and that I must stop going up to the apartment. She exerted herself to separate Rivera and me, and Mme S. lent her co-operation. I am sure now that in spite of all her protests of self-denial she thought of herself before everything else. She did not like me, although Max had asserted the opposite. Savinkov said to me one day:

"She can't be anything but jealous of your youthfulness and your talent."

On some evenings, then, Diego would warn me that he had to go to the S.s':

"I can't do anything else, Marevna. She buys my pictures, and she'll buy yours too, to please me. She gives me the pip, but an artist can't ignore these society women. Yes, they bore us stiff, of course, but they're useful – almost indispensable."

Soutine was to tell me the same thing later on. I must admit I was sorry for them all – and I despised them for their sycophancy.

So Diego went off to the S.s' with Angelina, now that she had recovered and could dress becomingly. I had practically nothing to put on my back.

"You're a thousand times more beautiful like that, in a slip or in nothing," Diego would say to pacify me. (I have since come to believe that every man tells the same story to his wife or mistress, and that it is an excellent means of economizing pennies.)

We did a lot of work, and Rivera told me that it was a long time since he had felt such zeal and such ardour.

"You're the cause of it, you know! I'm happy: what about you?"

I answered that my happiness was so great that I quaked day and night for fear of losing it; but I did not admit that I had a presentiment that I should pay dearly for these moments of happiness.

We were still very poor: Diego gave nearly all his money to Angelina, who needed it for herself and the child. When we ate at the studio it was always very scantily, and I resolved to ask Yura for help: he sent me several dozen roubles at once. I made some money too, by painting portraits from photographs of great Jewish poets, for a Russian *émigré* who had a printing press. I used the money to improve our dinners and to buy some coal.

Diego was very suspicious of my coming back late, and with money, and was jealous, although he was often out and was satisfied with telling me the reason was the big portrait of Mme S. that he was painting. One evening he asked me where I had been and when I told him I was doing some enlargements, which brought in money, he became absolutely furious: I have never been able to tell why. I thought he would strangle me, and then I realized that he was having one of his fits. He stammered incoherently, and all I could guess at was that he was convinced that I was deceiving him and that was where the money came from.

I got him to bed, and next day he was in a high fever. Rosa, who "did" for Angelina and other painters as well as for us, could find nothing better to do, when she found him in bed, than to run and tell Angelina. Angelina did not wish to come herself, but seized the telephone. Marie Blanchard would not come, but in the evening Mme S. arrived, all furs and scent. She hardly spoke to me, and sat down on the edge of Diego's bed. She tried to get him to move to the apart-

ment, where it was warmer; but he said that I was looking after him perfectly and there was more quiet where he was.

I stood with my back to them, looking out of the window, feeling like an intruder. I knew well enough that Diego was fighting for his liberty, but I was afraid of what effect the icy studio might have on him. At last I turned round and said:

"If Diego feels worse he shall move to the apartment. At the moment I am looking after him. I shall have some coal tomorrow and it'll be warmer. You may be sure I shall do my best to cure him of this wretched influenza."

"That's agreed, then," Mme S. answered. "*Au revoir*. . . I'll tell Angela Mikhaylovna what you've promised."

She went away, having behaved as if she was the mistress of the household. I said nothing, but raged in silence. Suddenly Diego began laughing – roaring with laughter.

"Oh, you can laugh," I said. "If you want to be looked after somewhere else, don't be shy: I'm not keeping you. I know it's not comfortable here."

"*Durochka! Detochka!* It's that woman that's making me laugh!"

"I can easily guess why," I replied. "Do you know I could twist your neck one of these days? I'd have plenty of opportunity. All these old hens who climb on poor artists' backs and get the name for being Maecenases – they're nothing but tarts. I see you working, creating, vibrating with life, and she's jealous of me. I'm poor, unassuming and decent. *She* was poor once, too, till she got divorced to marry a millionaire: she's altered a lot since then."

"Don't be angry, Marevna. I didn't ask her here."

So I nursed him as one can nurse someone who is more than dear, and one afternoon he was almost well, and could get out of bed.

I had finally become used to his fits of "lunacy", though each time I was terrified for my own skin. A particularly violent attack coincided with his recovery. He suddenly began talking in a language entirely strange to me, the very existence of which I had never even guessed. He seized me by the arm, knelt in front of an empty armchair and made me do the same by his side. Then, before a being quite invisible to me, he began to utter all kinds of explanations and petitions. He was livid and only the whites of his eyes were showing. He spoke quickly, seemed to wait for a response, and then replied in his turn.

I acquiesced docilely in this ceremony, for it would not have done to

risk opposing him at such a time. At a certain moment he turned to me and said in good French: "That's done. We are married before one of my Aztec ancestors. He consents that I should take you for my wife."

"Who are you talking to, Diego?" I asked, trembling involuntarily.

"To Marevna," he replied. Then, feeling my face, my hair and my body: "Yes, it's you, all right – that's what it is – to Marevna."

Sometimes in his fits he was in a raging fury. I could generally save myself by saying gently that I was Marevna, and begging him not to hurt me: he would hesitate, sniff the air and say:

"Yes, yes: I recognize your smell. I shan't hurt you."

But it was not always like that, and I still bear on my neck the scar he gave me in his frenzy.

We were walking in Montparnasse and, among the crowds, we met Picasso, who always paid compliments to women: this time he touched my breasts and said how beautiful he thought they were. This is a customary gesture of his: he did the same to my daughter in the summer and I laughed when she angrily told me what had happened – Picasso is always the same! But I was myself so untamed, such a *nedotroga* ("touch-me-not") that I stepped back, very angry, and had to restrain myself from boxing his ears.

Diego went white and foamed with anger. At home he said: "If he touches your breasts so unceremoniously it must mean that you're sleeping with him. Come on: confess!"

I only laughed.

"What do you mean?" he went on. "I saw a sketch of a nude at his place. I recognized at once that it was a drawing of you."

"And you asked him whether it was?"

"No. He wouldn't have told the truth. But I know what you look like so well that I didn't have to enquire."

"Oh, lots of women may look alike in nude sketches, you know; but I've told you already that I've never been at his house alone – to my great regret."

The words brought him to the pitch of fury. His lips were white with foam and his eyes were upturned. With one hand he twisted my arms behind my back and with the other he seized and opened a *nawaja* (clasp-knife) which was lying on the table. I begged him in a faint voice to have pity on his loving, faithful Marevna. He was shivering and shaking as much as I was. The knife grazed my throat: I fainted and

he must have let go of me and let me fall, because when I came to I was lying on the floor, with the open knife not far away. I felt my neck stinging, and I was covered with blood. I staggered as far as the looking glass: I was not a pretty sight! I washed myself and made a dressing with a handkerchief and a towel.

I felt pains all over, and my legs would not support me. I lay down and wondered why Diego had behaved as he had. Was it to frighten me into leaving him? Was he sorry? What was I to do? It was a nightmare. Above all no one must know: I must clean the knife and hide it in the coal-scuttle.

When Diego came back he asked me to forgive him:

"I didn't know what I was doing, Marevna. I'm mad! I'm jealous of all the men who knew you before me. . . . Tell me truly that Ilya has never been your lover! Swear it!"

I swore, feeling that he did not believe me, and he swore not to belong to Angelina. The days that followed were perfectly happy. Mme S. had bought several of his canvases and two cubist pictures of mine, so life was fine. We went to hear a series of lectures by André Lhôte in the rue Huyghens. Rivera would burst out laughing.

"That Lhôte!" he said. "He understands nothing about real cubism, any more than he does about constructivism. He comes and picks up whatever I may tell him and then makes the round of Gris, Braque and Pablo, and makes a fine omelette out of it all. You've only to look at his pictures!"

And he laughed as only he could laugh, showing his teeth and his pink gums.

"But apart from that," he went on, "he's a good chap: like a Marseilles barber who's got bitten by painting and wants to show everybody that he understands it and that he's become a great painter."

I knew Lhôte, who was charming. He often came to the studio to "talk painting" with Diego. Diego could talk for hours, drawing, explaining, turning pale and getting more and more agitated. Sometimes Matisse would happen to drop in, and Diego addressed the two of them by turns or both together, showing them his pictures and proving that each line, each angle, each cubic form was the result not of pure chance but of extensive knowledge and careful study. I listened eagerly, trying to understand in such a way that I could use what I heard in my own work. Sometimes the impressive Diaghilev called: he would look at the work of Diego, who showed him mine, which was

nice of him. Crowds of people came who were interested in modern painting and in that of Diego himself. I saw his growing importance among the artists, his energy, his intelligence and his goodness to his comrades. Sometimes, it is true, he would tell me that he did not want to see so-and-so any more – "I'm sick of him!" But after some time he would re-admit the person in question to his friendship – or would appear to – perhaps in obedience to some compulsion. His friendship was changeable and uncertain.

I thought that little by little I was beginning to understand and know him; but my youthfulness, my high spirits, my love prevented my having with him the necessary patience and composure. Moreover – unhappily for me – I burned with passion for him, and to this was added great fondness. And I was sincere: during the whole of our liaison, from 1915 until he left for Mexico in 1921, I was faithful to him, body and soul. Of course I was slandered to him during that time by people trying to slacken the bonds that united us, and even to detach him from me. The jealousies of women and men! If he happened to find a man sitting for his portrait in my studio in the rue Asseline he would rush away, and if I went with him to the landing he would throw me a curse and not come back for a day or two. He wanted me to work only at my own painting; but he never gave me the money which would have allowed me to do this, so I had to earn some: one of the simplest ways was to find friends who commissioned portraits, in order to help me to live honestly. But Rivera did not believe any of this, chiefly because the women he had known were usually rather flighty: he accepted my standpoint only reluctantly and refused to believe that I could remain faithful in the midst of so many men who were making up to me. He sometimes said that Angelina disliked our living near her: I said I was ready to go, but he would not hear of that, alleging that I should fall ill at my studio in the rue Asseline, with no coal and no one to look after me. I saw that he was torn between his love for me and his duty to Angelina and the baby. I think his weakness of character had something to do with it too: he was wondering how he could go on arranging our life. Perhaps he would have liked to live differently, but he had not the money to support two households.

One day he told me that Mme S. wanted to see me, and would wait for me in a café near the Gare Montparnasse. Now I disliked this woman intensely, especially after Diego had given her, without asking me, an engraving he had already given to me. On the same occasion

she had used some excuse to pull up her skirt nonchalantly, and let Diego have a good look at a piece of white thigh among her laces. I saw his eyes shine. I thought it so vulgar to try to rouse him like that. We quarrelled after she had gone, and he laughed at my jealousy, as he always did; then we would have a fight, which he usually won and he would patiently, slowly, tie my hands and feet as I lay on the bed or the floor, relishing his own strength, my defeat, my weakness and my amorous surrender.

I found Mme S. at the café. We were both embarrassed, but I looked her straight in the eyes (I have often been told that it was hard to stand up to my gaze: my father used to look at me like this, and his cold, blue, piercing eyes went right through me). At last Mme S. declared that my presence in Diego's studio was torture to Angelina because she could hear us from the apartment.

"You must go, Marya Bronislavovna."

"Is that all you've got to say? I've suggested myself, many times, that I should leave, but Diego refuses to be separated from me. Tell Angelina I'll go. It was she who wanted us to live near her. But don't think that by forcing me to leave you'll separate him from me. He won't give me up. It'll simply be an extra waste of time when he has to be continually running round to me."

I got up trembling, with my cheeks on fire. I felt ashamed for this woman and the game she was voluntarily playing between Diego and me.

"Take this for your move, Marya Bronislavovna," she continued.

"Listen," I said. "One day Boris Savinkov told me that you were neither intelligent nor kind, but vain and selfish. My eyes may be those of a *gimnazistka* (high-school girl), but I can see through you perfectly. Keep your money!"

Diego was waiting for me when I got back and I could see that he had known what the purpose of the meeting was: I was terrified of his feebleness and disgusted at the same time.

A day or two later I took my box of paints under one arm and under the other, as well as I could, the bath in which I used to wash the "kindly cannibal", and went to the rue Asseline. I found there a money-order from Yura.

Diego lost no time in joining me, and he begged me to come to the post-office with him: there was some money for him there and we would rent a better room somewhere in Montparnasse. When we got there I saw it was a money-order from Mme S. for five hundred

francs, and I told him to keep his money for himself: I had received some of my own, and cleaner, from Russia. I told him she was trying to get rid of me, in order to be able to come and see him at his studio without embarrassment.

"How absurd you are!" he answered.

Still arguing we started looking for a room to give shelter to our unsettled love, and one where I could work too. We found one at last, with two big windows with views along the boulevards Montparnasse and Raspail (of course one could see the Rotonde and the Dôme) and a lavatory, centrally heated, comfortable and pleasant to work in. Rivera insisted on paying the first month's rent: I let him because I was terrified of falling ill when I was penniless. So I moved in, intending to spend the winter there and hoping that one day it would be easier to get coal: after all the war could not last for ever!

In order to be free to come to my apartment Diego started a big cubist portrait of me, *décolletée*, with a lot of leg showing in transparent stockings, and sitting in the armchair he was fond of, quite near the window, so that I could feel a draught playing on my back. I said nothing about this: the picture promised well and I was greatly interested in Diego's way of working. From time to time, however, I did feel a pain in my left side and thought I should be lucky if I did not get pneumonia.

Then for two days Diego did not come. I suddenly felt very ill: how could I let him know? I needed poulticing and cupping, but apart from him I was seeing nobody. Our friend Dagusya was not at home in the mornings: she was out working somewhere. So painfully I dressed and, early in the morning, set out to see him. It was pure madness! Angelina let me in, and at first kept me standing on the cold stairway; then she would not have let me see Diego if he had not heard us and suspected that something was wrong: he put his head round the door and saw me.

"I'm ill and alone, Diego," I said. "Why haven't you come? Aren't you allowed out any more?"

Angelina stood watching us in silence.

"I'll come at once," he said. "Run off quickly, Marevna. I've been ill too."

I ran down the stairs like a madwoman, choking with shame and rage, angry with myself for coming there where I was hated, loathed. I knew that Diego would be furious too. It was cold out of doors but I

was covered with sweat when I got back. I threw myself on the bed and could hardly breathe. "Here we go," I thought. "My third attack of pleurisy."

Diego arrived fuming, but when he saw how ill I was he was mollified, and only asked me why I had come to upset Angelina. I told him he should have come, as he had promised, and that it did not amuse me to have to go and hunt him up.

"And now go to the chemist's, please, and bring something to rub me with and something to make poultices. I don't want to peg out here to amuse your wife!"

He came back with a whole chemist's shop and, when I had been daubed with iodine and wrapped in cotton-wool, he sat on the edge of the bed and tried to fondle me.

"You're devilish, a real little savage . . . but I love you like that. Listen, I'll have you brought up a very hot drink, and then I'll go and tell Dagusya. She'll come and keep you company if she can. I'll come and see how you are getting on."

He kissed me and left me alone.

Dagusya was a friend of both of us, a delightful girl – from Tiflis, like me. She painted and was devoted to it, but her talent was only an average one; she had a heart of gold though, and everyone worshipped her. She often used to laugh at me: "You're mad to be smitten with Rivera, a beautiful girl like you! There are enough men about you who are handsomer and more interesting, quite ready to shower attentions on you and let you live in clover. What do you see in the great gorilla?" I answered that it was true that he looked like a gorilla, but it was like Beauty and the Beast: the better one knew him the handsomer one thought him.

"You're quite crazy," she retorted, "but so long as your fairy-tale makes you happy . . . if only it lasts."

"It will last as long as I want it to," I answered, challengingly.

Diego and Dagusya nursed me, and after a few days I felt that I was out of danger, though I still could not sit for my portrait and Diego, with his artist's selfishness, did not conceal his vexation at the length of my illness. It was a very good portrait, although he was merciless in his portrayal: a white, triangular wash took the place of the face: one could guess it to be me from the fair hair. The simplicity of it was magnificent. When it was finished I asked Rivera to give it to me, but he took it jealously away.

LITTLE BY LITTLE SPRING CAME, JUST AS LITTLE BY LITTLE my money went. I ate at a *crémérie* in the rue Vavin that Dagusya went to, and nearly everybody I knew; but during my illness I had had food brought up to my room, and then Dagusya had bought me a spirit-stove and some saucepans. She bought the food and we warmed it up and had little dinners *à trois*. Dagusya had gradually begun to find that Diego was charming, when he wanted to be liked, and to realize that one could forget his great belly and his flat feet. He knew women, loved them all, I believe, and had an instinctive sense of what to say that would please them to hear. It is also true that genius emanated from all his pores: he was certainly no boring mediocrity, and women came to love him in spite of his ugliness.

While I was ill and alone I had written to Yura and to Max. Yura had answered that if I was ill I must come to Moscow as quickly as possible, where Gorki would introduce me to Mechnikov, who had cured him, Yura, completely, and would very soon do the same for me. Yura really was an adorable boy: he bore not the least grudge, he never complained, and he went on being, from far away, my brother and my friend. Max Voloshin had written that if I was ill and was not happy he and his mother expected me at Yalta, where there was the sun and everything that would restore me and help me to forget my misfortunes.

I showed Diego these letters and told him that he must not imagine that if I stayed in Paris it was because my prospects had been checked or that I was abandoned by my friends: I could perfectly easily find security elsewhere than in Paris. No: if I stayed in Paris it was for his sake, because I loved him and him alone. I hoped he would be able to understand, to judge my decision at its true value and make a precise estimate of the utter, disinterested gift of myself that I was making.

On another day when Diego and I had been quarrelling – perhaps because he had not been to see me; I do not remember – and had finally made it up, I let him kiss me, though unwillingly; but when he was on the point of going, and came to me to kiss me good-bye, I held up my lips to him, drawing him to me and, holding him with one hand by the shoulder, with the other I stabbed him with a knife in the back of the neck: I was so mad with jealousy that I wanted to hurt him, as he had hurt me. At all events, before he left for Mexico I saw a slight, white scar on his neck, where the hair begins.

He burst into loud laughter and said, as he wiped up the blood which was dripping over his shirt: "You flatter me, Marevna."

"You flattered me too," I answered, showing him my own neck and the disfiguring scar. "I shall certainly carry this mark till I die."

With the first suns of spring I had to come back to the rue Asseline. I furnished my studio more pleasantly, but certain things I could do nothing about: the lavatories were in the yard, and it was hardly pleasant to have to get up in the middle of the night, find one's way along the stairs in the dark and expose oneself half-naked to the chill of night. I was always afraid that Diego would fall down the stair-well or simply trip on the stairs; but he would never consent to use the bucket: finally he preferred to use the window.

And yet it was in the discomfort of my studio that our happiness was greatest, during the first two years. I dashed about like a mad thing to earn a little money and to be able to give him a dinner he might like. I bought another bed and new mattress; and I got hold of a special lamp in order to work better in the evening. We often drew at night, after dinner, both sitting at the table. He showed me the copies he had made of Cézanne, El Greco, Giotto and the Flemings. He told me amusing stories of his life in Mexico, talked about his work, his pictures, his ambitions. He would let himself go and sometimes he could be very gay, very boyish. He made me laugh till I cried with his songs and his dances. With a glass of wine on his head he would shake his great hips and wag his huge belly. His eyes sparkled and his mouth wore a broad, kindly smile.

I saw to it that he was clean. I washed his feet, which were very sensitive. He let his behind and his head be washed like a small child. It is a fact that he did not like water, I do not know why. When I watched him begin to soap himself in the morning it was really funny: he stood a long time in front of the basin of soapy water before he made up his mind to wash his face. He gazed at some point in space: I am sure that at these moments he saw lines and colours arranging themselves, and he remained motionless. Sometimes I lost patience: I jumped out of bed and quickly plunged his head into the basin; then he would make all sorts of animal noises with his mouth and nostrils, and after that would follow the rite of cleaning out his nose with a corner of a handkerchief, which I always found killingly funny.

When he spent the night with me I used to go in the morning for hot *croissants*, the milk and the newspapers. We played at being married,

I particularly, and I enjoyed it very much (probably because it did not happen every day). Then he went home to start work; and I would start too.

"Work! Work!" he used to say. "If only Marie and Angelina weren't so inefficient. You should see the fine exhibition I'd arrange for you: but what's the use? They sicken me!"

He regularly blamed someone else for whatever did not go right in his house or in his work. I heard one day that little Diego no longer lived with them: Angelina, wishing to be free of him in order to devote herself more actively to Diego and his work, had placed him in a children's home at Chaville. They used to go to see him together every Sunday. Diego loved his son, and there was nothing I could object to in that: it was very natural; but it was bitter grief to me not to see the child again, and I said as much to Diego.

"Don't worry: you'll see him all right one day," he said, to pacify me.

three PARIS

LAGNY-SUR-MARNE

CHÂTILLON

L'ISLE-ADAM

TAUSSAT

I

TOWARDS THE END OF THE TIME I HAVE BEEN WRITING OF Rivera began to speak of his new friends, the Fishers, who were Danes. The man was a gifted sculptor, well known in his own country, and his wife painted. Diego was very fond of them and I was most anxious to make their acquaintance; but since we had been in love I was as though enclosed in a magic circle: I could not meet any of his friends, not those, at all events, that Angelina used to see because, from the day on which he had gone back to live at the rue du Départ, everyone had taken him to be officially her husband again. I was left with only Ehrenburg and Dagusya who, as a matter of fact, also went to the rue du Départ. I did not want to see any of my many friends now; I preferred to be alone, in order to avoid being slandered or coming under one influence or another. I lived wrapped up in myself, my work and my love, and that was enough for me to think my life abundantly wealthy, despite my loneliness.

When Diego came he showed me his latest drawings and asked me whether I liked them. He tried several times to make pencil-portraits of me, and some of these drawings were successful; they were stolen from me afterwards with some others, water-colours and two oil-paintings. I very much liked his manner of drawing: his delicacy of line reminded me of Ingres, but the construction was firm and sure. Later on his drawing assumed greater sharpness – clean lines with no retouching, and the portraits he made of all kinds of people were remarkable for their character and accuracy. He was already getting ready in this way for his great frescoes, in each of which his touch is at once recognizable, spacious and simple, clean and strong, and also profoundly true.

He once gave a small exhibition of his drawings – I have forgotten where. He had told me about it; I went, and was delighted with what I saw. They were priced at two hundred and fifty francs each. I knew he was in need of money (what artist is not?) and I bought one – unfortunately all I could afford.* I took it home and hid it; then I hung it on the wall. When Diego came to see me I asked him whether he was pleased with the sales at his exhibition, and he answered that not a day passed but a drawing was sold and that if all went well he would be able to give me a little money.

When he was in bed he suddenly caught sight of the drawing hanging at the other end of the studio. He jumped out and ran, stark naked, to see that it was really by him.

"Who bought you that, Marevna? It's the best one I showed."

I answered that, having sold myself, I had made myself a present of the drawing, and that I was well satisfied with my purchase. He was furious. Come to his show and buy one of his works? Me? It was madness! I answered that I had done it with all my heart, in gratitude for the help he had given me at certain times.

"No, no, *ditya*! It's impossible. Take your money back. Here! And I'll bring you some more drawings as well: you must have them to please me."

I need not say that I was enchanted.

The Fishers lived at Arcueil, and Diego often went to see them with Paul Cornet, the sculptor, the daughter of a well-known Scandinavian poet, a Brazilian painter and the latter's very pretty wife, Kiki. I felt very much hurt at not knowing the Fishers; and I would most often stay at home waiting for Diego, or he would arrange to meet me in the street and we would stroll along the boulevard in the warm night fragrant with chestnut blossom. Sometimes we would lie down on the still young grass of the fortifications, or sit in the darkness on a secluded seat, and lose ourselves in the depths of loving tenderness. I was much shorter than Rivera: in order to put my arms round his neck I had to stand on tiptoe and I remained suspended from him, hanging from his lips. He laughed as he supported me like this, pleased at his own strength. Or he would hold me in his arms like a child; and at those moments I forgot my resentment, my having to play second fiddle, my poverty. I was young and sanguine, and I believed in a great love: anything else was only the paltriness of life. One had only to look on the bright side of things to be happy in spite of everything; and my future looked rosy and rich.

Not that our life was without its storms. There were times when paltriness got the upper hand. One evening, for instance, when Diego had told me that he would be very busy and unable to come and see me, I went to Ehrenburg's boulevard Montparnasse home. He was alone and welcomed me joyfully. He brought out a bottle of rum or cognac and offered me some. I had not cared for drinking since I had known Rivera, not only because I distrusted liquor but also because I no longer found any pleasure in it; so I refused the glass that Ilya offered me. He insisted: he was very happy to see me there after such a long absence, and he suggested we should "celebrate it".

"Celebrate what?" I asked.

"Why, Rivera's and Mme S.'s love affair!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, yes: his love affair with that fat charwoman scented like a whore! Everybody knows about it, you know. Are you going to go on living in a fairy-tale and float about on clouds for ever, Marevna? Wake up, my angel! Look at this table: you'll find truth there. There is no other truth than the bottle with its golden, perfumed elixir. Come: quaff intoxication and oblivion!"

He was quite close to me and tried to kiss me. I seized a towel from the foot of the bed, wrapped it round Ehrenburg's neck, and in my rage and disgust I began to pull it as tight as I could. Ilya fell on his back on the bed, and I hung over him, continuing to pull. He waved his arms desperately, scratched me and kicked his legs about, but I held him down with all my might.

"Horrible gorilla! It was you who threw me into Diego's arms, and now that Max isn't here any more you're doing everything you can to part us and wreck our reputations. You're revolting, you drunkard," I whispered, voiceless from so much emotion.

I do not know how this tragi-comic scene might have ended, for Ilya was swollen and purple in the face: he was rolling his eyes and making the most fearful grimaces, he had a rattle in his throat and gurgled . . . but the door opened: Katya came in and stopped dead before this grotesque spectacle.

"Marevna! Marevna!" she cried. "Stop - you'll strangle him. What are you up to, the pair of you?"

She threw herself at me, but I was already untwisting the towel, and in the end I let Ilya go.

"Your husband's repulsive, Katya," I told her. "He's a coward and an evil man!"

Whereupon Ehrenburg, straightening his shirt collar and tidying his hair with his little hands, said reproachfully to me:

"Idiot! I was joking to see how you'd react. Well, I think you're as mad as ever. Come on, let's drink to your love affair!" and he filled three glasses. We drank, and talked about something else; but I have never forgotten that scene. I told Rivera about it: he laughed long and loudly and said he was sorry for Ehrenburg, who was jealous of us two; but I told him that I had lost my trust in my friends, however intimate.

WHEN DIEGO "CAME BACK FROM A VISIT TO LE CANON," NOT far from Cap Ferrat, he confided to me that his son, who was still at Chaville, was not well, and that Angelina and he had decided to bring him home. They did so, and Diego soon began to complain to me that Angelina did not know how to look after the child properly. She used to consult a book by a German doctor, but that did not help because all the women she knew, and their friends, interfered with advice. Diego raged against "all these kind women". He could no longer work peacefully, and was preoccupied with the health of the child, who was one and a half years old, but very big for his age, so Rivera said. I was fond of the child and I reproached Diego for being so feeble. The child would have been better tended in a hospital than at home. There all three slept in one small room. A delicate child ought not to have slept with them and breathed the fetid air of a tiny room. This showed an ignorance or a neglect of the elementary rules of hygiene. I told Diego this, but he said he was sickened by interference from all sides and was letting Angelina do as she pleased. I saw very well that he was unhappy about the child, and I was unhappy for him. What Angelina wanted above all was to remain Rivera's wife, to take him back from me, to be an artist and follow Diego everywhere, as before. Perhaps it was painful for her, at thirty-seven, to resign herself to being only a good mother. Yet she loved the son who had, partly at least, brought Diego back to her; or at all events she had regained Diego's good opinion, and won his affection and gratitude. The child was, so it was said, quite exceptional. I understood all that and I hoped with all my heart that little Diego would live, to rejoice his father and – in my secret soul – myself.

However, time passed and the little one did not get better. The winter came. Rivera sometimes looked in in haste to give me news of him. During one of these visits I asked him to make me a present of his old overcoat, for I was short of warm clothes and it was freezing in my studio. (He had then a good Raglan coat which we had bought together in the rue St-André-des-Arts.) He answered that the old coat was being used to stuff up the window in the child's room!

When he did not come to see me I used to run round and wait outside his house, whistling a tune he knew well. He would hurry to the lavatory and out of the window he would throw me a newspaper on which he had scrawled a few words in charcoal to tell me whether he was coming or not. This was before the child fell ill; after that I used

to wait by the Edgar-Quinet Métro station, from where I could see Diego's windows. If there was a white towel in the lavatory window it meant that he was coming; if not, that he was not. Sometimes Angelina took the towel away, and our rendezvous system was upset.

3

ONE EVENING I SAW HIM COME IN VERY PALE. WITHOUT TAKING off his coat he said he must go back at once, that the child was not at all well and that he feared for his life. He looked fearfully unhappy and I did not know what to say. All words are ineffectual in the face of great misfortunes.

"Perhaps there will be a miracle," I said. "One must believe so."

"Good God! When I think of that gang of females! There they are, chattering like magpies. D'you know, Vasilev came and suggested the child should be given suck? No, no! They're all —"

"Whose fault would it be," I asked, "if the little one did come to die?"

"Whose fault? The war's, of course. The war's first of all. Could we have done better for the child? — leave him at Chaville? You'd catch your death from the damp there. At home? There's no comfort, and we are short of coal."

But also, he should have said, they would go out and leave the child alone, and he would work the bed-clothes off his cradle. Everyone was partly to blame. An artist's child is perhaps sacrificed too often to the selfishness of its parents. A child upsets one's way of living: it requires attentions that it is not always given, out of negligence or thoughtlessness. . . . I was to learn later, from my best friends, that Angelina accused me of being the real cause of her little one's death. I am still wondering how this could have been possible; but doubtless a scapegoat was required, and it was I who was chosen. She could not have hurt me more deeply.

Two more days passed. I ran to the Métro station to look at the windows of their apartment. I guessed what was actually happening

behind them and I shared the pain of both of them. One evening, when I was lying on my bed in the dark, I heard Rivera's slow, heavy tread on the stairs. I felt a pang in my heart. When he came in and, as usual, stopped to hang his hat and stick on the screen, I knew already. He came to the bed and almost sank down on me.

"It's over," he said, simply.

From these words I understood the full extent of his grief and despair at having seen the child he adored suffer and die from their neglect. We remained silent a long time. I gently stroked his head and dried his tears: he fell asleep from fatigue by my side. When he woke up he said:

"I must go back all the same. I can't leave Angelina in this state: she is wretched. But nothing keeps me there any more – the apartment weighs me down – it's painful to me now. Élie Faure told me I ought not to have children, Marevna: they wouldn't live. If I ever had another son he would die too. Don't tell yourself any more that I might have a child by you: it would be a disaster."

I answered that if the child came from me things would be different, because I was twelve years younger than Angelina; I was more robust in health than they were; that if I had a baby I shouldn't sacrifice it for anyone and should do everything to spare it sickness and poverty.

His child had just died, and we were talking about *my* child, as if it were something possible – one day.

"Diego," I went on, "perhaps it's stupid to say this to you: you are suffering from the shock of a great grief. But I know that Mexicans do not look on death as Europeans do. Your son has gone away, but he will come back one day, in another body – believe me! And, if one day I give you a daughter, promise me to love her."

He could not repress a feeble laugh.

"She'll have no luck, like all girls – like you, *dutya*."

The child was buried next day. Hidden behind a tree in the avenue du Maine I watched the hearse go by. Two or three carriages followed it with the parents and a few intimate friends. I followed the *cortège* on foot to the Montrouge cemetery. The cold was cruel, but the sun shone and gave me courage. At the cemetery I saw them all get out. Diego was supporting Angelina, who was enveloped in veils. I could not help thinking they both looked comic: he, tall and broad in his Raglan overcoat which made him appear still more enormous; she, small and slim on her tiny feet with high heels (she had very pretty shoes). I

followed them from tree to tree: then came the moment when everyone stopped before the open grave. My eyes were burning with the cold and with tears. When I opened them again they were all going away. I let them go and then went up with a few flowers I had brought. The gravedigger had started work and was throwing in the earth by shovelfuls, to warm himself. He watched me for a moment. I stood there gazing at the hole which was rapidly filling and would keep that little body for ever – a body which had promised much and had lived so little. . . . I left my flowers among the others heaped round the little cross inscribed "Diego Rivera". I promised myself I would come back.

I had to go home on foot. I hardly felt myself walking, for my legs seemed to be made of wood. I have never again felt such cold in Paris. When I reached my place I had to light a fire, cost what it might; and I wept, out of grief and because I could not make the stove catch. My fingers refused to obey me – and yet God knows I would willingly have given my iron fingers if that could have brought the child back.

Diego worked hard in order to forget, and Angelina, too, had started painting energetically again. Meanwhile revolution had broken out in Russia and our Russian friends, Ehrenburg among them, began to vanish. Their departure emptied Dilevsky's canteen on the boulevard Montparnasse, where I used often to go. We saw the disappearance of Trotsky, who used to come from time to time to eat there with us, an unaffected Russian, always taciturn and solitary. Lenin also disappeared, though as a matter of fact he came to the canteen only once, and no one was the least surprised on that occasion, for Dilevsky, the *émigré*, an ex-naval officer, knew all the Social Democrats, Marxists and Russian revolutionaries in Paris.

4

EARLIER THAT WINTER, BEFORE THE CHILD DIED, IT WAS PARTICULARLY cold. I could not manage to keep warm at home. I burned chairs, window-sashes and picture frames. My hands were chapped and it hurt me to hold my brushes and palette. Sometimes I had to wash

my face at the safe, where there was not water; at home I had neither
 water; I had to go down to the yard with my jug and bucket and
 draw water – provided the tap was not frozen too. They were terrible
 months for me and for everyone in the poor part of the town. Besides,
 when an alarm was sounded, one had to jump out of bed and dash out
 into the street and then into a shelter – the depths of dismalness.
 Because of these alarms Rivera came only seldom to go to bed with me.
 He and Angelina used to go down to the cellar of their house, or
 perhaps to a Métro station. I believe that this was how the child got
 badly chilled. I myself, for the most part, walked about the streets, a
 prey to terror and distress. Or I slipped into the *crémérie* where I had
 been a regular customer and where I still ate sometimes, on credit.
 One could crawl in by an opening low down in the iron shutter. Once
 inside one was enveloped in pleasant warmth. I drank chocolate, tea
 or a glass of wine if I was stood one by a kind friend (there was always
 one there) and we would stay there talking nonsense till the alarm
 was over. There were even people who managed to get drunk, and
 when the all-clear was sounded you saw them coming out of the
crémérie, their legs unsteady, describing comic arabesques on the
 boulevard.

During the war, if Diego was with me at the rue Asseline when there
 was an air-raid alarm, he would stay, and we would put out the lamp
 and go to bed. My conscience would prick me and I would say that
 perhaps it would be better if he went back to the rue du Départ, for
 Angelina must be terrified, with the baby and all; but he would answer,
 with his mind elsewhere:

"She's certain to have gone down with the child and Marie (Blan-
 chard) to the cellar. I'll go later on."

I was overjoyed to have him near me, of course, but I cannot say that
 I was particularly proud of myself, or of him, at these times.

Lying side by side, then, in the warmth of the bed, we forgot the
 alarm and all the fuss of everyday life, and lived our life *à deux*. After
 love comes tenderness and companionship.

"It hurts me to know that you've had other lovers: I sometimes
 think of killing you, and I should like to mark you for life, so that you
 wouldn't forget me."

He had a bee in his bonnet about Ehrenburg. Had Ilya been my
 lover or not? And Veloshin? And Savinkov? And Gorki? He wanted
 to know the names of my other Russian friends. I told him frankly

that all that belongs to the past; and I wanted to know nothing from him about anybody.

"Yes, because you don't really care twopence about me

We joked for a bit, and then we began to tell each other all kinds of stories. I described my childhood at Cheboksary, near the Urals, where I saw such a medley of peoples – Cheremis, Chuvash, Kirgiz; my father, the mighty hunter; the great forests of the Volga and the Caucasus; the first stirrings of the Revolution. I softly whistled and sang Russian and Georgian airs. Diego talked passionately about his Mexico, and all he told me was most interesting and sometimes very odd. (Ilya Ehrenburg once said to me that Diego always went from one extreme to the other: he could never live or feel like everyone else. This was true, and I noticed it myself. That was why I would not profit from his infatuation with me, and why I refused to marry him when he proposed to me.)

"I was born," he told me, "at Guanajuato. My father, who I'm very fond of, as you know, was called Don Rivera, and he was born in Mexico too. He is a man of great courage: he is now a schoolmaster, but he is also active in politics; he supports the Mexican people and the Indians, as I do. He has had an interesting and eventful life. When he was thirty-seven he married a girl of good family, twelve years younger than himself. She was called Maria, like you, *dutya*, Maria del Pilar Barrientos. Her father, dead now, was a telegraph-operator in a Spanish mine: he was more than liberal in his views. Maria's mother was half Spanish, half Indian. I was very fond of her.

"My grandfather was born in Spain and bore the title of marquis: I'm telling you the truth, *dutya*; I can show you the papers." (What did I care whether his grandfather was a nobleman or not? My grandfather was too!) "But he lost his title of nobility and his possessions after he was compromised in some political opposition to the King of Spain, and he fled the country to avoid arrest, prison or worse. It was the king who sequestered his title and possessions, but if my father, or I, had gone back to Spain and licked the royal feet, we might perhaps have obtained pardon for the past and been granted my grandfather's title. Lick his feet! But tell me, what use would the title be now? When one is poor one stays with the poor, and you know yourself that there are titles much more gallant: they are bought at the price of blood, but they are more glorious. Well my grandfather, Citizen Anastasio Rivera, sailed for Cuba and became a merchant, then

a soldier and revolutionary in Mexico at Guanajuato. He was an extraordinary chap, you know: he didn't marry till he was fifty, a very beautiful Mexican girl who was only seventeen, Ynés Acosta: her parents were of Portuguese descent. At sixty-two Grandfather joined Benito Juarez in the War of Reform and then enlisted in the Mexican army against the French. The Archduke Maximilian of Austria was proclaimed Emperor of Mexico. That was a joke, you know: do you know the end of the sad story? Well, Maximilian was killed, and my grandfather never came home; so his widow of twenty-nine was left with three children to bring up as best she could."

Diego's grandfather had been a great practical joker. During the war the Mexicans had taken prisoner a French officer, who was very frightened of snakes, of which there was an abundance. "My grandfather found this funny and told him that there was only one sure remedy for the bite of a poisonous snake and the consequent painful death, and that was to swallow human excrement at once, as the Indians did. 'Shit?' the officer spat and swore he preferred death to lowering himself to the level of the wretched Indians. 'What filthy savagery!' he cried disgustedly. So my grandfather planned a trick on him to test his courage. When the Frenchman was asleep in his tent one night someone pricked him in the thigh with a pin. He woke up and yelled: 'Help! I've been bitten by a snake!' Everyone crowded round, and he begged: 'Save me, for the love of God.' My grandfather examined the almost invisible prick on his thigh, and warned him that he must expect to die in five minutes: he must make haste to write his letters to France and then say his last prayers. The French officer cast himself at his feet and implored him to save him, no matter how. 'Then,' said my grandfather gravely, 'there is only one thing to do, which I have already told you about – but quickly, or it will be too late!' The officer nodded his head convulsively: 'Quick! Quick! I feel my strength failing!' The other Mexicans turned aside to conceal their laughter. 'Here, man,' my grandfather called to a dirty, swartly soldier: 'Go and shit on a newspaper and bring it to me with some bread. Make a big sandwich, as you do with cheese. Go on: quick as you can, otherwise the *señor* here will die.' The soldier opened his mouth and stared, but he got a thump on the back: 'Quick! Quick! It's an order: obey it.' The soldier disappeared and came back in a few minutes with a queer expression on his face, carrying a sheet of newspaper like a dish. When the French officer saw and smelt it he

turned green!" (Diego described it all as though he had been present.) "Grandfather looked at his watch and said very anxiously: 'Come on, *señor*: make up your mind to it, or *adiós*! It will be too late. One! two! three. . . .' The Frenchman held out a shaking hand, shut his eyes, held his nose and began with groans to bite into his sandwich. He hardly chewed at all, choked and turned yellow; my grandfather supported and encouraged him. "There! There! A little more and you're saved!" When he had finished it the officer vomited noisily, opened his eyes and looked round: yes, he was alive! by a miracle he felt quite well! *Merçi, monsieur. ¡Amigos, muchas gracias!*" he began, but everyone round started roaring with laughter, and Grandfather confessed their great hoax. The Frenchman took it badly – it's true it was in very bad taste" (I thought so myself) "and fumed with rage, shame and humiliation. They fought a duel with swords, and the end of it was that they were reconciled. Funny, wasn't it?" Diego laughed. "Yes, but surely the Frenchman married a beautiful Mexican with Indian blood," I said, "and they had several little Mexican children and were very happy."

"In 1886," Diego went on, "my mother was brought to bed of twins, myself and a brother born later. I was so weakly that in order not to frighten my mother the midwife ordered a servant to put me away somewhere. I was put in a dung-bucket." "Oh!" I cried, in pity and indignation. "Yes, indeed," Diego continued. "It was my grandmother who found me and nursed me back to life. She did what Indian women do: she killed some pigeons and wrapped their warm intestines round me, rubbed me with medicinal herbs and thumped me, calling softly: '*¡Venga, venga, muchachuto! ¡Venga, niño!*' and I came back to life, to my grandmother's great renown. She told me about it later on, and I've remembered it all.

"Eleven days later we were baptized in the church of Our Lady of Guanajuato. I received the name of Diego Maria de la Concepcion Juan Nepomuceno Estanislao de la Rivera y Barrientos Acosta y Rodriguez. My brother was named Carlos, and he died when he was nearly two. Little children were badly looked after in those days, you know. And I, who had nearly died as I entered the world, began to grow big and strong, and they called me 'Diego, the splendid child from Guanajuato'. I began scrawling with chalk or charcoal on the wattle floor and the walls of houses, and I proudly signed myself 'Diego Maria Rivera', and later, 'Diego Rivera'. My whole family

thought I was a prodigy. Judge for yourself. When I was eight and my sister Maria three, our little brother Alfonso died suddenly: he was only eight days old. He was put in a little coffin on the piano; and Maria and I went into the *salon*, and we saw this pretty new doll in its box full of lace and flowers; and I took the doll out of its box and showed it to Maria, and she wanted to have it in her arms at once, and I wanted it too, to undress it and see how it was made. So we began running about the room pulling little Alfonso from one side to another, both shouting at the tops of our voices. They opened the door of the *salon* to see what was going on in the dead child's room, and a fine picture they found! The little coffin on the ground and us viciously tugging at the arms and legs of our half-naked, dead brother! A scandal, *ditya*! What a scandal! I got a beating and so did Maria, we didn't know why, and we squalled, and the others shouted, and the whole street gathered round our house, and the next day the whole town was talking about it. And after that," Diego laughed, "instead of being 'the wonder child from Guanajuato' I was called 'the devil's child from Guanajuato'!"

"At nine years old I 'knew women', and liked it. There was a girl of ten, a family friend. Mexican girls are precocious; but I looked older than I was, you know: I was tall and strong. I don't regret it. I prefer that to what boys do, messing about with themselves in the lavatory in school.

"I was very mechanically minded too. I told my father and mother that I wanted to be an engineer, a doctor and a painter – all of them! My father congratulated me and encouraged me; but my mother cherished an ambition to see me a soldier. You know how women love uniforms: it's silly. From 1896, when I was ten, I was at the San Carlos Fine Arts Academy: my mother was reconciled to the idea that I should not be a soldier. I was not satisfied with the academy, where they made you draw from plaster models and copy pictures or do still-lives – quite idiotic." (This reminded me of my lessons at the art school at Tiflis and at the *gimnazija*.) "Then I worked with several landscape artists, but the person I was most struck by was Posada. I was very talented, you know, and he taught me engraving. I would compare Posada at that time with Goya: he has an honoured place among Mexican artists. Later on I went and studied at Madrid, Toledo and Barcelona. In 1911 and 1912 I sent canvases to the Salon in Paris. When I came to Paris for the first time, and had my first sight of pic-

tures by Cézanne and Rousseau, I was knocked flat. I liked Picasso very much too, but I was still under the influence of Toloiga: I worked in his studio." (I told Diego that when I had arrived in Paris I, too, had worked at a Spanish academy, the *Englada*.) "I saw all the European painting, went everywhere, visited all the museums – I was bewitched by painting. I went to Italy, Belgium, Holland, London. I was fascinated by the poverty of the life of working people in London." (What changes have been brought about since then!) "London was interesting, but gloomy and damp, and I thought this would be bad for fresco work. I saw pictures by Turner and Hogarth; if you go there one day perhaps you'll see the museums: they're very interesting. At Brussels I admired the work of Pieter Brueghel. At Bruges I met a friend from Madrid, Marie Blanchard: I liked her, for she was fresh and pretty. I was nineteen and she was twenty-five. I went back to Mexico for some time, and then a revolution started. You know the Mexican temperament *al fin*, it's like a volcano, continually working underground. It boils up and suddenly bursts out and begins to spit fire and vomit lava.

"Then, in 1914, I came back to Spain and afterwards to Paris. Marie Blanchard and Angelina were there too." (I told him I had seen him for the first time in Rosalie's *crémérie*, looking just like a Moor, wearing a workman's blue overalls, like Kisling, and all smeared with paint, especially on the behind, because that is where one wipes one's fingers and brushes; and I liked him at once: I liked his head! He had been twenty-eight, Angelina thirty-four and I twenty-two.) "*Ditya*, you were an adorable girl. Madame S. used to laugh at you and call you the 'high-school girl', but I thought you were charming: spoilt, enthusiastic, volatile! That is why I fell in love with you: and we wasted a year before we went to bed together! You fled from me as though I was a policeman." (I thought, myself, that if instead of dying my father had come to see me in Paris, everything would have been different. I couldn't be sure that my father would have felt as I did about Rivera: perhaps he would have made me go to Poland, to get married there.)

"I met everybody then in Paris: Picasso, Juan Gri (Braque had gone to the war, and Guillaume Apollinaire and Kisling too, but they used to come back on leave), Picabia, Zarraga, my countryman, Severin, Modigliani, Gottlieb, Marcoussis, Jacobsen and Fisher, who were Danes, the Japanese Fujita and Kovashima; and the modern poets, André Salmon, Cocteau and Max Jacob. I met your friend, Ilya

Ehrenburg, too, who is such an eccentric – as indeed we are! He's writing a fanciful novel, you know: *The Life of Julio Jurenito, the Devil's Disciple*. I've told him a good deal about my life in Mexico: I hope it'll be an interesting book! With Ilya there was Max Voloshin, Savinkov, Steinberg and his very pretty wife, Lipchitz and Berta, his wife, Natalie Goncharova and Larionov, Archipenko, the Russian sculptor, Zadkine, Orlov and his wife Anna, Meshchaninov – and you, *ditya*."

Listening to what Diego told me about his life, his work, his struggles and his ideas, I found it all passionately interesting; and then in 1921 he left for Mexico – I shall not say finally, for he came back several times: but he never came to see us – which was contemptible of him – out of fear of his daughter, and perhaps of me, too.

5

ONE MORNING DIEGO AND I WERE MORE THAN STARTLED out of our sleep. For a moment I thought that a bomb had fallen on the house (I confess that there were times when I almost wished one would). Trembling, we pulled on our clothes as well as we could, and rushed out into the street. Nothing. But we walked round and, a few houses away, we noticed some huge holes in a neighbouring street. The fronts of the houses and a small bar had been destroyed; the shell had killed a pregnant woman. It was Big Bertha having this sort of fun. In the mornings and during the day she sowed panic among the population, and at night it was the aeroplanes. . . . Eventually one gave in, in spite of oneself, to one's dread, and worked badly.

Besides, the war gave us a lot to talk about. More friends were killed or wounded. I remember Apollinaire in his hospital bed. Diego and I went to see him: his head was bandaged; he had a smile on his lips and he showed us the hole in his helmet. I remember Cendrars, with one arm missing but still with his irresistible good humour; his red face radiated gaiety, his blue eyes were full of laughter, and he told all sorts of stories, waving the shoulder that had no arm to it.

This was the time when Rivera told me that Apollinaire had been responsible for Marie Laurencin's success, and added: "You see? That's what you lack, you need a friend like that. I myself haven't got enough influence or authority here to help you as you ought to be helped." I answered that this did not matter; that everything would come to me – if I might go on working at his side. But quite often I was short of canvas and paints, and I begged him to bring me some materials for my work. He would put it off till the next day: he forgot, or even was himself without what was needed. I had to perform miracles to get any work done; but when I had managed to get myself a good brush or a fine new palette Diego would beg me to lend them to him – "I shall think of you when I'm using them." And I had not the courage to reproach him for his selfishness and lack of feeling. He wanted me to work, but he forbade me to live the same life as before – out of jealousy, perhaps, because there had always been too many men round me – "To tell the truth there are three people in you, Marevna," he said, "one boy – and it's true you're very like one of my comrades, who is dead – and two women: one who is simple and well-behaved, almost angelic as Ilya says; and another who is just the opposite. It's this other that everyone likes and that specially attracts men. Frankly, why aren't you a courtesan? That would suit your capabilities perfectly." To which I answered, half vexed, half sorrowful:

"Oh, I know quite well that then I should have everything I lack. And so would you; but I know also that I should not have the unadorned happiness that I want. I should belong to everyone and no one; I should not be able to love a poor man because there would always be a rich man to pester me. There's only one thing about that profession that I should like: the ability to help the artists round me, the girl-mothers and their children. . . . And you: do you think you'd love me more if I was that?"

"Very hard to answer; but I believe I couldn't share the woman I love with everybody, or even with anyone. No: that's impossible. What is possible is that I should desire you the more because of that. . . . But touch a woman who shared her bed with someone else – no, never!"

As I listened I told myself that perhaps this was not entirely true – not the rock-bottom of his thoughts; but I kept that suspicion to myself.

IN THE CHAOTIC ATMOSPHERE OF TORMENTED BODIES AND minds over-stimulated by alcohol and drugs (of which the evening with Modigliani at Montmartre is an example), I felt myself continually dominated by a vast melancholy, and I had the sensation that I was irremediably alien to my surroundings. I let myself be allured by one and by another, yielding to mere curiosity, to a desire to see those great men behaving like madmen, or like hysterical school children. I can truthfully say that at such moments I pitied them more than I admired them. When we went, at dawn, we left behind a regular battlefield. The floor was covered with strips of paper torn from the walls, bottles and broken glasses and overturned furniture, more or less damaged; here and there lay the bodies of drinkers and drug-takers, unable to get up, like motionless corpses, half-naked, their clothes torn and soiled with vomit. I must say that I was present at only two or three of these orgies, and always in the company of Ilya, Katya, Vitya, Paul Cornet, a good sculptor, and André Delhay, and each time I brought away an aftertaste of bitter despair, for these people's despondency was contagious. Evenings like this exerted a morbid attraction, but I had enough strength and will to escape and to forget quickly. This health-giving power I drew from my love and my work; but the danger I avoided in this way I found again elsewhere. Under Rivera's influence I withdrew from these nocturnal extravagances, but I ended by living too much a solitary, a voluntary recluse, and from the gay and lively creature that I was by nature I became mute and suspicious. Only, detaching myself from this band of demoniacs who slept for half the day in order to live through the night until dawn, I worked better and more determinedly. How many women, for lack of this power, have sunk into madness or disease and have died wretchedly in hospital? The effect on me was that although Diego and I no longer did anything to avoid having a child I was stricken for three years with barrenness. I was tormented by this, for it was not normal; and Diego himself advised me to go to the hospital and see a doctor.

Vitya, who often came to pose for me since I was painting a portrait of him, gave me the address of a Russian doctor at the Cochin hospital in the rue St-Jacques; and one day I took my courage in both hands. I was examined, and the result of that was that I was told that I was in urgent need of an operation. Of course I was suffering from the fatigues of my irregular life, but I believed that I was strong and

healthy. My weakness, I thought, was situated in my lungs and bronchial tubes; I could not stand cold or damp, and I had often been advised to take a trip to the south in the winter.

I did not know what to do. I wrote one day to Mme Savinkov, who had stayed in Paris and came to see me at once. I told her that I thought it rather odd to be barren at twenty-seven and that at the hospital I had been advised to have an operation at once. She was very nice and gave me a word to Professor Pinard, trying to encourage me not to be too frightened. (It is certain that in hospitals they are in too much of a hurry to operate, probably with the sole purpose of using as guinea-pigs subjects like me, unmarried and without a family.) One afternoon, then, I went to see Professor Pinard. Mme Savinkov, who knew him well, had warned him, besides giving me the letter of recommendation to him. He was a man already advanced in years: a real "papa". He examined me carefully, found that I was well formed, enquired about my profession and my customary mode of life, asked whether I had a lover and how he behaved in our sexual relationship. I explained that there was nothing *bourgeois* about our love-affair, and this was now the third year that we could not manage to have a child – was I abnormal? At the hospital they had proposed to operate on me straight away, thus answering this question in the affirmative.

"Don't do anything of the sort, my dear," he said. "Above all don't run the risk of being sterile for life. You are suffering from a fatigue which comes from the slightly . . . violent character of your sexual relationship: men are often selfish, and care little for the health of their wives or mistresses. You have a slight displacement of the womb, that is all. Go to bed early for a time; do not be too violent or passionate in your relationship with your friend. Take great care with your intimate hygiene; and come back in a fortnight to tell me the result. You're at a fairly critical age for a woman, my dear, an age when a woman ordinarily has a fervent desire to have a child. I am convinced that the child that you will have will be healthy and good-looking: you've all the necessary stuff in you for that. And don't forget to keep me informed: I am keenly interested to know whether my diagnosis is correct."

I went out as light as a feather in the wind. I believed what this man had told me: I felt I had been miraculously cured.

For a fortnight I followed his advice exactly: plenty of hygiene, plenty of rest, no amorous excess nor immoderate fatigue. I felt rested, clear

of eye and light of heart. One evening we set ourselves, in conformity with the instructions in a Hindu book, to start a baby. Diego told me with a laugh that if even this did not succeed it would be a sure sign that the book was "badly written". I had the notion that he was certain that I was incapable of having a child; and when I told him joyfully at the beginning of March that at last I was pregnant he would not believe me.

"You're trying to have me on," he answered, laughing. "Mark you, I shouldn't be sorry: perhaps you'd leave me time to get on with my painting."

"And with other women," I put in. My gaiety had come back, I was beaming with joy and visibly changed. My happiness communicated itself to Rivera and he came more often. He was happier, too, and worked with spirit.

7

ONE MORNING IN THE SPRING OF 1919 WE SET OFF FOR THE Meudon woods – to work. It was a splendid day: the spring warmed us and raised our spirits. We felt young and gay, all our anxieties forgotten. Diego painted two water-colours, one, as I remember, lying on his back and looking at the great trees shooting up towards the sky on every side of him, and forming three huge, green discs above his head. It was most unusual, and I, for my part, had never seen, or thought that one could paint, anything like it. After our walk we sauntered about, kissing each other among the trees. Rivera would run and try to catch me, but I was faster. At one moment, when I had let myself be caught by him, he tied me to a tree with a strap, bound my hands with his neck-cloth and said:

"Now: tell me the truth, no lies: are you pregnant, yes or no?"

I laughed, somewhat embarrassed and trying to guess what was at the bottom of his thoughts. He picked a small branch and began to lash my naked thighs and shoulders with it. At the same time his eyes glowed and flamed: I thought it was the beginning of a fit.

And a fit it was, of a kind; but of another kind. If just at this moment a forest-keeper had come along, or a puritanical promenader, we should certainly have been in for a scandal and an official report; but the god of the fauns and satyrs must have been watching over us. At all events that day has remained alive in my memory: I had never seen Rivera in a state like that. He was drunk, but drunk with nature and the sun and bless me! he behaved almost like a cave-man.

We walked back arm in arm towards the city where we must each take up again our swine of a life; but this time he was clearly convinced that I was pregnant: all the way he was looking at me and smiling, curiously and very tenderly. Meanwhile I, for my part, was continually wondering: "Is he pleased? Or is it a nuisance for him? Or is it a joke to him?"

He was certainly very much afraid that the child might suffer the fate of his own son. I tried to demonstrate by every possible means that I had now found my balance again, that I was healthier, stronger, surer of myself in every way. My whole life had, if I may put it so, recovered its colour. If Diego did not come to see me when he had promised to do so, I did not allow myself to be cast down or to wallow in the dismal; although sometimes I did experience violent spasms of rebellion when I observed that he was lying to me or neglecting me immoderately; and then I had recourse to blows. I remember that my landlord once saw me, from his doorway, hitting Diego like this with an umbrella – oh, not maliciously: just paying him back in his own coin.

He lied, yes – often shamelessly: he could even admit afterwards that he had lied to me; and that I could not stand.

I remember also that one day during the war I went to find the landlord to apologize for not having paid him a penny for a year and six months, and especially to ask him to fill up a hole in the floor of my landing (when I came in one evening I had felt the floor melt away underneath me and had found myself sunk in it up to my middle). He was an architect, my landlord: he never asked me for money and left me in peace: there was a war on – and besides, he liked artists.

"I saw you the other day," said this splendid fellow. "You didn't wallop him hard enough, madame. What? When I think that you're so nice and he lets you live all alone! Without giving you any help! He allows you, in your condition, to be reduced to earning your own living! Not to mention the fact that apparently he has another wife,

older than you." (I wondered where he had these details from.) "If I were you I'd chuck him and arrange my life differently . . . especially since you Russians are courageous, persistent and gifted."

It was true: I was working, for Diego could not afford to support me. I must not expect it, and I did not want to ask or lay claim to anything. He was working hard himself, I knew. By seeing his underclothes and shoes one could easily realize that he had not enough money for himself.

I wrote to Mme Savinkov explaining the situation and asking whether something could not be done for me. I wanted to find regular work for several months. (Her husband had just come back from Russia, and soon after that he came to me himself to find out whether all was well. "Are you still in love with Rivera?" he had asked. I answered that I was, unhappily for everyone. But I had not then informed him of my condition.)

The Savinkovs invited Diego and me to spend an evening with them. (Among my friends they were the first, except Ilya, who did not hold me up to shame.) There was a crowd of people, almost all the Russians who had been able to get out of the country, and everyone was talking about himself, not listening to anyone else, telling his adventures and the dangers he had survived after the Revolution. It was enough to make one shudder, and I regretted not having been in Russia at the historic moment when a whole society, rotted by centuries, had crumbled. Savinkov and his wife were extremely nice to me – to both of us. When we took our leave we promised to come back.

The next thing was that Savinkov got me to come and work in his office, at the request of his wife who had told him the whole truth about my situation. I worked from nine or ten till noon and then from two in the afternoon till four or five. But for the first month I acted as secretary to an old admiral who had been paralysed by a stroke. He dictated to me his "ideas" – somewhat incoherent ones – on a parallel between the lives of the Russian and French peasants. He asked my opinion, and I told him all I knew about the French countryside and everything that I had seen with my own eyes. After this I read these lucubrations of his to the people in the office, which amused us very much. When the admiral began to recover from his paralysis I often went with him to the Bois de Boulogne. He told me anecdotes and sang Russian tunes. It was not very hard work, but I was horribly bored. Later on, when I came to work in the office, Boris Savinkov himself watched, when he had the time, to see that I did not fatigue myself too

much. I had special permission to come at ten and to leave when I felt at all tired! Savinkov was a boss to dream of! Nobody was allowed to criticize me: if I misspelt the names in the lists or on the envelopes that I was given to copy, they were corrected, without my being sworn at, as anyone else in my place would have been.

I shall never forget the interest that he and his wife took in me. I was being paid three hundred and fifty francs a month for doing nothing but waste time which, if otherwise occupied, would have been precious to me. It was such fine weather out of doors, and I wanted to go into the country and play the fool. Then I was given a rise of fifty francs, and I could buy things for Rivera that I had long dreamed of giving him: a khaki American shirt, two pairs of short drawers, socks and sock-suspenders and a lovely tie. I left them all, wrapped up, with his *concierge*. I was terribly pleased. I also bought him a pair of claret-coloured pyjamas, for the evenings when he came to see me. (Poor pyjamas! Unfortunately they shrank a bit in the washing, and as for the ones I bought for myself at the same time, after the first time they were washed the jacket did not reach my waist and the trousers came only halfway down my thighs! They made a splendid effect . . .) I am sure Rivera never had the courage to tell his wife, when she saw the parcel, that it was I who had bought these things for him: on the contrary, she must have been certain that he had made the purchases himself, and probably criticized his bad taste.

8

DIEGO ANNOUNCED THAT WE SHOULD SPEND AUGUST AND the first fortnight of September at Lagny-sur-Marne. I was overcome with joy and with gratitude to the Fishers (I had met them at last), who had used their influence with Rivera to advise him to take me into the country. Fate seemed to smile now that I carried within me the child that I had so longed for. Nothing could have been better for me than to go away at this time, and as far as possible. I was a great child myself.

It was a little two-storeyed house, very sunny, at the edge of a forest. The landlady was an old woman in a blue jacket and apron and a stiff, pleated skirt, with a little white cap on her head. She was tiny, pink, wrinkled – a real picture. She cooked our meals – I helped her sometimes and we all ate together in the garden. Diego set to work at once, and I sat for him, in a cellar, dressed like a peasant-woman; but I could not stay long sitting on a little bench with my head bent. At the end of the first picture I resigned: the protests of my child against this kind of fatigue were too lively. Besides, it exasperated me to see Diego working so hard that he lost all idea of the time; he once crumpled up on the floor, from exhaustion, showing the whites of his eyes, with foam on his lips. Not without difficulty I managed to raise him and help him come up out of the cellar to his bedroom on the first floor. He had given me a bad scare.

After that the little old landlady began to sit for him, in her free moments; but she had plenty to do, poor woman, with her fowls, her rabbits and kitchen-garden, the flowers and our meals! Diego also painted landscapes, and I have a very clear memory of one which he was working on as the night fell. When I went to fetch him I saw him standing in the middle of the countryside like an image, half asleep already. His tall, dark silhouette was outlined against a sky that was still light orange: everything else was drowning in the blue-purple dusk. He did not stir, as though he was hypnotized by some vision. When I was close to him I called him very gently, and he started awake, as if coming out of a dream. I used to help him carry his gear, and he would tell me whether he was pleased with his work or not. It was difficult to work as the day was failing. He asked whether I had been working too, and if I was well: he looked at my merry face, and added: "I didn't know it was possible to be so happy with you!" We fell hungrily on the victuals that were waiting for us, and then went up to bed; but Diego went on for a long time still looking at his canvases by the paraffin lamp or a candle, cleaning his nose with a twist of his handkerchief; then he would sneeze and decide to go to bed. We talked quietly about our work, about colours, the composition of a picture, about ourselves, and the child. Sometimes I showed him a letter from Angelina that the postman had brought, and we read it together. Diego would laugh at the affectionate, almost loving, phrases that it contained:

"Poor old thing!" he would say.

"Not as poor as all that," I would answer. "And wicked: so wicked! Beside her I'm an angel. She has suffered by her one fault, and it's over: while I . . . what has the future in store for my child and me? She must leave you your freedom now; she must take her hooks out of you. Our lives she is spoiling already, but I'm certain she'll do everything she can to ruin the child's, as long as she's alive herself. She's a witch!"

But perhaps Diego was telling Angelina that I had my hooks into him: who knows? He told me that she begged him not to desert her – otherwise she would kill herself. That was real blackmail: it was I she wanted to get him away from; his other mistresses she not only put up with – she was even delighted, so long as it was not myself. Such malice, such harshness: were they not unworthy of a woman of intelligence? Of a woman six years older than Diego, twelve years older than I? She ought to have realized that for her it was all over. And Diego, in his feebleness and cowardice, lent himself to this cruel game.

And yet during most of that stay with Diego in the country what confidence I had in the future! I had faith in my strength, my talent, in Diego's friendship, his love, the permanence of his attachment. And sometimes he seemed to encourage my hopes.

He had some fearful paroxysms during this time in the country. I was terrified of being near him at those moments. I once even ran out into the garden in my nightgown and hid myself trembling under the table. He came downstairs after me, barefooted, with no trousers on, himself wearing nothing but a flickering shirt that made him look like a ghost or a scarecrow. As usual he was brandishing his great Mexican stick to drive away the evil spirit. In the moonlight his white upturned eyes frightened me out of my wits. He came up to the table, touched it with his stick and suddenly said:

"Come out, *ditya*. Come out from there. I shan't hurt you. Come on."

I had to obey: it was dangerous to oppose him. He sniffed at me, felt my face, smelt my hair and, convinced that it was really myself, went on:

"I was surrounded by evil spirits and I thought I should lose you."

I took him gently round the waist and led him to the stairs. He made himself heavy, like a child, but gave no resistance. Upstairs I pushed him on to the bed and, as I washed his feet, he was already asleep! During the night he woke up and felt that I was not asleep: he asked me why. I answered that I was watching over him. It was my

child too, that I was watching over: I was so frightened for it at such moments.

He did not succeed in frightening me, though, when he used to make the most fearful grimaces, saying that the child would probably have a face like that. I said that it would not, but that he had better look out, for I should tell it what he had tried to do to it! He only laughed, but I knew that this laugh of his was often a cover for embarrassment and a lack of self-confidence.

One night, when we were in bed, I heard a noise followed by a groan. Diego said he had heard nothing, and I got up and went with a candle to the old woman's room. I could hear more groans coming from inside, so I pushed open the door and there the old grandmother lay on the floor, on her back with her pot beside her. She had obviously fallen off it and had not had the strength to get up again. (I had told Diego he would kill her: he had been working her mercilessly hard, making her pose for a picture he was painting in the Flemish style. She had to stand by a table in the cellar; Diego went on working for hours at a time, and it was all I could do to get him to stop at the end of the day. Her hands trembled so that she could not drink the bowl of milk I brought her, and she was so exhausted that later on I had to help her cook the supper.) I could not lift her, and called Diego, who ran in in his nightshirt. We put her to bed and Diego fetched a bottle of *marc* from the kitchen and forced her to drink a glass of it. All the time she did not speak, but looked at us with sorrowful eyes. We covered her up well, and tiptoed out.

"Suppose the old thing pops off?" Diego said suddenly. "That'd be a fine game."

"We must warn her children, or get someone to warn them."

Day was just beginning to break when Diego dressed hurriedly and went and knocked at the window of a butcher who knew the old woman's family, and told him that our landlady had been taken suddenly ill in the night. The butcher and his wife were dishevelled and still half asleep, but they began moving about and Diego came back and said:

"Listen, *ditya*, we must get our things together and shove off as quick as we can. Her children will come and look after her: we must give place to them. Anyhow, I don't want to see them with things as they are: I should have to talk . . . explain . . . no, I haven't the courage. Better to be off."

Reluctantly, exhausted by a night without sleep and still badly scared, I obeyed, although I was annoyed with Diego, whose selfishness was the cause of all the trouble and who now, in his cowardly way, was not hesitating to leave the old woman all alone, forgetting that she had been so nice about posing for him and had not even dared to say that her old legs would no longer support her.

I laugh, nowadays, at the memory of this, but that day we ran away like naughty children, without telling anyone or asking for our bill. But this funk that Diego was in over his responsibilities to our old landlady, and the possibility of having to explain things to her children, gave evidence and interpretation of his nature. At all events it helped me to understand him better. It threw a light on his attitude to his wife and to me. He was brave when animated by passion, but the accidents of life, and the hard work that it entails scared him: he simply found them a nuisance. He was just a big, naughty child.

With some difficulty we dragged ourselves and our luggage to where we could catch the first carrier, a little horse-cart which took us from the scene of the incident. In spite of everything I carried with me an unforgettable memory of those few weeks of life spent with Diego, of being alone with a great artist in a countryside which was enchanting both from its nature and from its inhabitants. At one moment Diego had even wanted to buy me the little house, which he could have had for only four thousand francs: he was prepared to borrow this sum from Rosenberg, but I dissuaded him for, although at that time I tended to prefer solitude, I thought it was rather a long way out of the world and that the winter must be fearful.

We came back to Paris looking well and very brown; though I had been badly bitten by insects from sitting on the ground and sunbathing out of doors: Diego had escaped this. I was now seven and a half months gone, and the most ungainly, the most painful part of my pregnancy remained. I asked Diego to find me somewhere not far from Paris where I could soon go to live, and spend some months there after my lying-in. He promised to see about it.

IN SEPTEMBER 1919, DIEGO ANNOUNCED THAT HE HAD RENTED for me a nice little apartment at Châtillon, at a widow's who lived with her daughter; there was a big garden and I should feel very well there. I told my landlord, then, that I was giving up the studio and took him a picture and a few drawings to thank him for his kindness to me during all the war years.

"Oh, come," he said. "There was nothing special in that: we had to help each other, of course. Be brave, and be more firm with your friend. Come back and see me: if I can ever do anything for you I shall be more than glad to. I've a soft spot in my heart for Russians."

One day I moved, all on my own. I liked my new place very much, although the sky was grey that day and I thought I was going to be a long way from the rue du Départ. My new landlady, a German, the widow of a French musician, was pleasant, and must have been good-looking: nowadays, with her hair grey and pulled tight, she dressed with the austerity often displayed by women of her age who like to go often to confession, frequent churches and perform numerous retreats. Her daughter, still quite young, was charming – "going to be a musician like her father," her mother said. She had a pretty name: Sylvia.

Diego promised Mme Pite to pay the rent regularly, and promised that he would come and see me regularly too, twice a week . . . "and I shall be able to see you at Dagusya's too." (But he would soon be leaving for Poitiers.)

I wanted to furnish the new apartment to suit myself, and there was much to be done. I ordered wood and coal, and I energetically sawed up the wood for later on, when I should be back from the clinic. It was hard work but it had to be done and I had no one to do it for me. I also went into the garden: there was a delightful nanny-goat living there. Mme Pite was a constant companion, telling me about her agitated life and her husband, a very gentle man apparently, but who drank and ran after women: always the same story!

I exhibited one or two pictures that year at the Salon d'Automne, and I was determined to go on varnishing day. I had a roomy cloak, blue with narrow yellow stripes and a big, blue velvet collar, which became me and suited my condition. The place was madly full: I met Dagusya, who said Diego had left me a message before starting for Poitiers, where he was going, as he had always wished, to study the tapestries and the famous stained-glass windows in the cathedral. The

message was to beg me to let him know by telegram about the birth of the baby.

Everything became clear: he had just pushed off, perhaps with a girl, running away from his responsibilities. Doubtless things would have been different if it had been in the early part of our intercourse that I had given him a child – possibly our whole relationship would have been changed.

At all events, the crowd, the jostling – the news of Diego's departure too – made me giddy and I suddenly felt very unwell. Dagusya, vexed and disturbed, saw me to a taxi and told the driver to drive as quickly as he could to the Baudoclocque Maternity Home in the boulevard de Port-Royal. It was already evening when we arrived, and we had to wait for the attendant on duty – according to the regulations – while I tried to pull myself together and not have the baby on the stone floor of the hall. At last I was allowed into an enormous ward with interminable walls on each side, along which were beds with women lying in them. I was allocated one of these beds and authorized to undress, and put on a harsh nightgown and a dressing jacket of the same stuff. My belongings were taken away and from then on I was anonymous, abandoned in the middle of the ward and the women. It was now seven o'clock in the evening, and a kitchen attendant came by with a trolley, with two great saucepans on it, to dispense the soup. She stopped by my bed and planted herself there with her two great, red hands on her hips.

"What's this now, I wonder," she said. "A Joan of Arc or a Mardi-Gras get up?"

I wore my hair in long curls in those days, with a fringe – my forehead. After leaving Tiflis I had let my hair grow and had affected a hair-style which made me look like someone in an ancient fresco. "A Mantegna head," Diego said.

I looked at the attendant and I understood at once the importance of her rôle for all the women in this ward.

"I've nothing for you this evening, little one. You came without notice, and all the portions are accounted for."

I was the only one she did not give a helping to, and I should see quite well that there was more than enough left for me in a big dish of potato *purée* and another where pieces of meat were floating in gravy. There was also some bread left. It was clear that this woman had taken a sudden dislike to me from the first moment – perhaps because I

looked different from everyone else? She bent over the card hanging at the foot of my bed and read my name, profession and nationality.

"Why don't you go and have your baby in your own country?" she started shouting "Here the food is for the French first of all. All these foreigners, they gobble and grow fat at our expense, and take advantage of us being too kind or too stupid "

That was the kind of welcome waiting for me at the Baudelocque. "Us" was not the chef – Professor Pinard had sent a message to him about me – but a mere kitchen attendant who gave me to understand, as clearly as possible, that here, too, I was only an "intruder"

My tears, tears of exhaustion, mortification, loneliness, ran onto the harsh nightgown that scratched my skin, and yet I must be good and patient from now on it was too late to cry and be sorry for myself. For the moment I must think of nothing but the child, and keep my composure and good humour that was the only way of evading innumerable annoyances

We were woken at six o'clock and given a laxative and allowed to wash our faces in hot water. Everybody was talking, laughing and whispering. For the first two days I was the target of the inquisitiveness and sarcasms of some women who hoped to profit by backing up the kitchen-woman, but I contented myself with staring at them, as I had once upon a time at Yelena Kirillovna

A doctor, with whom Professor Pinard had put in a word for me, gave me an auscultation and told me to stay in bed. I admitted to him that I had sawn and broken up wood and carted heavy objects about during my move. He scolded me

"You must wait a bit more," he said "The child is not quite there. You're beginning to lose the waters, it's true that's nothing. Stay quietly here while you're waiting "

Of course my conversation with the doctor was overheard, and his goodwill towards me at once made a good impression. Then Dagusya came to see me, bringing an album and some crayons, so that I could draw under the very nose of the kitchen-woman, who would certainly have preferred to give me stockings to knit or something to sew, as she did with the others. As a matter of fact I did not know how to knit, and why should I sew for a coarse creature like that? Of course all the women wanted me to draw their portraits, which I did; but since they were all wearing the same – uniform, one might call it – it was only by their heads and hands that the peasant, the little tart, the dairymaid,

and the middle-class woman could be distinguished. The doctors and nurses were interested in my drawings, and sometimes pretty nurses would come and ask me to do "a little portrait" of them.

As I gradually brought my fellow-patients round to my side by working and helping to tend others, the nasty kitchen-woman gave in at last and became more good-natured: she had found herself alone in the battle with me. Unfortunately there came a day when there were no more beds free for new arrivals. I had occupied a bed for a long time – too long – and I should have to give it up if my confinement was still delayed. The doctor said he was sure I had made a mistake about the date, and advised me to go home, although I explained to him that it was a fearful long way if I should have to come back in a hurry, and that I was "certain, absolutely certain" that the baby would be born in a day or two.

"These Russians!" he said.

Finally they asked me to put my things together and go and wait in a room till they had finally decided about my case.

The very day before I had sent a *pneumatique* to the Savinkovs begging them to come to my assistance and arrange for me to stay on longer at the maternity home. (I must say that when I did leave the hospital I found myself absolutely without a penny! So I was anxiously waiting for Boris Savinkov's answer. Rivera was at Poitiers – far away.)

While I sat on a bench with my little bundle, shivering with cold and apprehension, the kitchen-attendant began serving breakfast to the others; as she passed the glass window in the door of my room she threw me a glance of triumph: at last I had been kicked out, even if it was not for long.

All of a sudden a nurse came into the big ward and asked for "Madame Marcvena Vorob'ev". I opened the door of the room and said who I was. She handed me a *pneumatique* which I made haste to open, and read: "Keep calm. Don't stir from where you are. Everything arranged for the best. You'll be brought money too." I felt reassured and almost happy: someone was heeding my distress. In fact, a few moments later a senior nurse told me that I might stay and keep my bed. Triumphant in my turn I made my re-entrance into the big ward, a smile on my lips. The attendant nearly choked with disappointment. She was compelled to give me some breakfast.

"You're lucky, you are!" she said.

"No, not me," I answered. It's my *baby* that's lucky."

That was the morning of 12 November.

My pains began in the evening, and I had a very bad night. Dagusya came to see me next day, and we talked of the Salon, the artists, the pictures exhibited, of Diego. From time to time I felt a sharp pang and I would press myself against the wall, my arms stretched above my head.

"Is that to relieve the pain?" Dagusya asked, smiling. I answered that I had always done gymnastic exercises and that I hoped in this way to make the birth easier.

The others were talking all round me, telling me stories of their earlier confinements, their illnesses and the illnesses of their children and husbands. This was the hardest time for me. I should have liked to be alone, in silence, to concentrate and understand what was happening inside me. I had always considered a birth to be something beautiful and miraculous, and I think so still. There are men and women who make out that it is an ugly performance, in the same way, they say, as a pregnant woman is ugly. I repeat that I have always thought it a strange, splendid phenomenon. Of course, nine months is a long time to carry a child, and nature would give us infinite comfort if it lessened this time by half. (Men too, I think, would be glad if things were shortened: the pregnant woman, the confinement, the nursing, the very smell of milk, and this, and that . . . they seem to be greatly put out by it all. But really: they have only to think about that a bit earlier. . . .)

* * *

The child was born between seven and eight in the evening, on 13 November as Diego wished: he himself had been born on 13 November. It was a little girl – tiny – "a little frog", the doctor said.

"I'm sorry it's a little girl, madame. . . . Do you want to keep her and suckle her? See how little she is and how she needs you."

I saw it, and she was already entitled to my love. In one sense she seemed a stranger to me, she so much resembled her father.

With all my strength, with all my flesh, with all my mind I already loved this child that I had wanted, desperately desired, like a joy, a miracle, an absolution for my past life. I remembered the happiness I had had at carrying it within me, in spite of so many difficulties and the sorrow I had felt at being parted from Diego; for I had sung and danced all by myself in the garden at Châtillon; I had never been in

such perfect health – because I was alone, no doubt, and free to conjure up Diego and his love for me in my imagination. That was what had sustained me, that and the country air and the desire of my whole soul that Diego should love the child that I was carrying with such glee.

IO

DAGUSYA AND FISHER CAME TO SEE ME NEXT DAY AND THE moment they saw the nurse come in with a cluster of newly-born babies in her arms they recognized my daughter.

"There's Diego!" they said, laughing

Her little forehead covered with hair, her eyes, her mouth, small but rather swollen, her pallor, all betokened a different race. Among so many babies which were red or pink she looked, if I may say so, almost greenish. Everyone soon called her "Diega the little Mexican": she had nothing French or Slavonic about her.

Diego was informed by telegram and he arrived a day after the child's birth. He came towards me trying to hide a nice little bouquet behind his back. He was nervous and ill at ease. Seeing him I was reminded that Angelina had had a room of her own, and reminded also of the two big bouquets that he had come with once upon a time, one for her and one for me. As I looked at this giant leaning over me I wondered what obscure power had been able to bind us to each other.

Supper was brought and I invited Diego to share my meal. He had come straight from the station and was starving. We made an odd picture, the two of us. I could see how intrigued the people round me were at seeing this very tall gentleman, with his huge hat and enormous, parti-coloured stick, swaying on his flat feet among all these women's beds.

"He's a Mexican, and she's Russian . . . artists. . . ." I heard whispers near my bed.

After Rivera's visit my temperature went up and the doctor scolded me: the baby was too small; if it could not suck it must be put in the incubator. The nurse brought the baby, put her ring-finger into its

little mouth, to make it bigger, and immediately afterwards I offered it the breast. It began to suck at once, the milk came – all went well.

One day I was asked whether it should be christened privately – this was usual; another day they enquired the father's name: I found all this most unpleasant: if Diego had been there it would have been so much simpler. Besides, there was nothing to stop him from going to the *mairie*, if he wanted to, and acknowledging his child. He did not ask me anything – he said nothing. I, out of modesty – pride, perhaps – waited for him to suggest that he should acknowledge his daughter; so when I was asked what name the child was to bear I gave mine and my father's, since I was entitled to call myself "Vorobëv-Stebelska". But on the birth certificate they put: "Daughter of Vorobëv and Stebelsky" – one of the accidents that often happen with these bits of paper. I was convinced that I had done all that was necessary to have my daughter acknowledged, and said to myself that later on Diego would certainly put everything in order. It was not worth while tormenting myself about that! (Six or seven years later I was told that my daughter had neither father nor mother because "I had not acknowledged her." There had to be a special paper for that, stamped, of course, and two witnesses. I saw to this: my witnesses were the owner of my hotel and a shop-keeper where I bought my provisions. My daughter cost me 80 francs and the *apéritif* I stood these gentlemen in a bistrot near the *mairie* of the 14th *arrondissement*. She was not dear, it is true, but I am vexed at the negligence which let me go from the hospital in 1919 completely ignorant of French law.)

The day came for me to leave the maternity home. (I thought that Diego had paid and had arranged everything for me. . . . Alas! They had to dun me for the money later, and in the end it was the City of Paris that paid for my confinement.) I had a thousand francs on me, sent by Boris Savinkov who in fact did more for me over this business than Diego did. We took a taxi to Châtillon where a fire was waiting for us and a little cradle I had bought. I put the baby in it, and told Rivera that I was suckling Marika myself.

"You call her Marika?" he asked.

"You used to call me that, didn't you?" I answered. "I've called her the same: it's a very pretty name."

That was all.

Marika put him out. For instance if she began crying when he was there I would leave him and run to the baby. One day, in a rage he took

me by the throat and squeezed it fearfully hard. (I remembered the time when I had very nearly strangled Ehrenburg.) I do not know how, but I was certain that the child and I were disturbing him, either in his work or some amorous adventure. (Yet God knows it was seldom enough he came to see us!) Suddenly the baby started crying and he let go.

"She's saved you," he said.

"What have I done to make you want to kill me? You forsake me: you do nothing for the child. I'm not demanding anything from you – only your presence here now and again. If you still love me, give me a little love; if you don't love me any more, give me your friendship, your moral support: I need it badly just now. As soon as I'm better I shall work."

He went away, still in a rage.

Sometimes I got a *pneumatique* to say he was not coming; sometimes he came without notice.

The spring came and the little girl was magnificently healthy; but Diego was only giving us a hundred and fifty francs a month, and there was the rent, wood, coal, food (very moderate), without counting fluctuating expenses: water, gas, electricity, medicaments . . . and I was tormented with the idea that my milk was not rich enough for the child. When Diego did come we were happy: we went for long walks in the country and chattered away as before; but I felt that a new element had entered our life. . . . And a time came when Diego had not appeared for six days. Mme Pite advised me to go to Paris to see what had become of him – "He may be ill: anything can happen; but don't remain without help, with your baby" . . . and since I had not a penny she lent me enough for the return fare by tram.

It put me down not far from his house and, with my baby on my arm, I began to wait in the street. When he still had not appeared by midday I took courage and went up to the floor where he lived. On the door was written "Diego Rivera. Angelina Beloff." In spite of my fear I knocked. The door was opened at once by Angelina, scarlet in the face.

"I should so much like to see Rivera," I said. "Does he still live here? It's almost a week since I've seen him. I've no more money, no work. . . ."

"Certainly Rivera lives here – with me!" she answered in a fury. "But he's not in. How dare you come here?"

And she slammed the door in my face so hard that the baby began to

whine. I was boiling with rage: it was for this creature, then, that Diego was forsaking me and my child. If anything happened to the baby they'd both be glad and say "Good riddance!" Well, I would struggle on. Diego was weak, but I must be strong enough to hold him in spite of everything – not so much for myself as for the child.

I went to a square close by and fed the baby – for fortunately I could still do that – thinking that perhaps Diego was really at home all the time. Suddenly I saw him striding towards the house. I stood up and called his name. He jumped as though he had had an electric shock, saw me and came towards me.

"All these days I've been meaning to drop in on you or write; but I'm terribly busy, you know, Marevna, frightfully busy. Why have you come?"

"To see whether you weren't ill, and also because while I'm waiting to be found some work to do at home I haven't a penny. Mme Pite lent me the money to come. What am I to do, Diego? I don't want to parade my poverty, but I really must find some work, because obviously you can't give me more than you do: perhaps you're robbing yourself as it is. But the baby, yours and mine. Look at her: isn't she lovely? Are you frightened of her, or of Angelina and the scenes she makes? I've just seen Angelina, and she slammed the door in my face. I don't think I could ever have been so cruel. If she'd come to me with her child I'd have been ashamed, and glad to open my door to a woman – a woman of yours, especially, Diego – who was knocking to ask for help."

"You did that? You went up with the baby?"

"I told you. I hoped to find you at home. It's not entirely my fault, you know, that I've no money. Mme Pite wants her rent too. How wretched it all is! And I was so afraid something had happened to you and no one had thought of telling me."

I stood there looking at his pale face, his beard, his eyes which were searching me with his usual gaping smile.

"I haven't any money on me. I'll give some to Dagusya this evening and she'll bring it to you tomorrow morning. *Au revoir, ditya*: see you soon."

What was I to do? He might forget to go to Dagusya's. I could not rely on him any more. But it was my fault too. Between him and the child I had chosen the child, since little Diego lived in my memory, his illness and death. I refused to sacrifice my daughter. I must resign myself for the moment: the child would grow, and at the same time

life would improve; Diego would come back and would love his daughter in spite of all the women round him, in spite of Angelina's jealousy and malevolence.

I went back to Châtillon and next morning at ten o'clock Dagusya arrived with the promised money.

"You know, Marevna, Diego's mad with anger at your going to see Angelina yesterday."

"It was Rivera I went to see. Tell me, yes or no: isn't there a card with the name Rivera and another with Beloff? There's no "Monsieur et Madame Rivera". He's sworn to me that she's not his wife any more, nothing more than a pathetic friend who begs him to remain with her in the eyes of the world. She hasn't the courage to stand up to reality, to face the truth that I've been able to have a child by Diego, too. She's frantic with hatred of me."

"I went to see her yesterday just after you did. D'you know that I found her in a fit of hysterics? She was rolling on the floor and wanted to throw herself out of the window."

"Listen, Dagusya: listen to *me*. I've wanted to throw myself and the baby under a lorry in despair and disgust at Rivera's cowardliness and that woman's hatred. Disgust at their perpetual lies, at my weakness and my poverty; but I haven't the right to abandon my daughter. First of all I must help her to grow up and become strong. Perhaps there'll be a miracle. . . . But tell me, how did you get in to Angelina's?"

"I found the door open. Then Diego came and she tried to jump out of the window."

"It's just what I thought. All that was only make-believe. She'd set the scene for Diego and it was you who arrived. She'd never suspect that you're telling me about it at this moment! That's why Diego can't call his soul his own: he's weak, and in order to have peace, and a little bit out of charity, he consents to lead this life. He deceives her, I know, and *she* consents to that – so long as I'm not the other woman: she hates me, wishes I was dead. Only what am *I* to do, eh? How am I to take being deserted, all this deceit, the destitution that awaits me tomorrow? I can't rely on Diego any more, and I wish so much I could accept nothing more from him, could deliver him from the child and me, entirely!"

"Has he acknowledged Marika?" Dagusya enquired.

I answered that he had not. When he came back from Poitiers and found that, not knowing what to do, I had given her my name,

Vorobev, he had said in a rage that this was because I was not sure that it was his daughter. I told her he was behaving despicably, but that one day he would be ashamed: I should leave it to his conscience, for he would never hear another word about it from me.

"But, Dagusya," I went on, "don't think ill of me. I'm only asking for a little pity for the baby. You don't know how terrible it can be to tell yourself that tomorrow there will be nothing to eat and that that means I shan't have my milk. Why should the baby suffer for the sins of her father, her mother and a woman who hates her? And don't talk to me about Angelina's sufferings! If she'd looked after her son decently. . . . And Marika's only five months old: what will have become of her a few months from now?"

Dagusya was a good soul, but for her own reasons she had taken Angelina's side. Angelina might not be Rivera's legal wife, but in the eyes of the world, for all my sincerity, for all my poverty, I was the intruder, the adventuress. I had chosen solitude and freedom, but also the harder path. To live alone and free I should have had to be able to reckon without anxieties and poverty. I should have to earn my living: should I then be able to stay at Châtillon, far from my friends, from the life of art and, above all, from anything which might give me, if I worked, a little material assistance and security? I must think seriously. . . .

And still Diego did not appear, while I waited and waited and looked after the baby.

The baby looked magnificent: I put her out naked in the sunshine, and she grew; she was solid, and gilded all over by the sun.

Fisher, who often visited us, took a photograph of her when she was five months old – a great little parcel of brown flesh that bore an astonishing resemblance to Diego.

One day Fisher came and told me that at the instance of himself and his wife Diego had at last consented to acknowledge the child. He gave me a rendezvous for the next day: I was to get the baby ready and I would be fetched early in the morning. I made the preparations: no one came. I learnt later that at the last moment Diego had lacked the courage to do this good deed. What sort of man was he, then? The Fishers tried to hearten me by telling me that Diego was an artist before anything, and that for him conscience and duty came after his painting. . . . But that did not prevent his having a burning passion for love-making and women – all women.

I FOUND WORK WITH THE RED CROSS IN PARIS, SEWING SHIRTS and drawers for the wounded and prisoners; but I had not the experience to make more than two or three francs a day. I racked my brains to try and think of something better, and at last I hit on it. I had a Russian bridle, woven in several colours, that I wore as a belt: I would try and make some more by hand. I got some thread, fastened several lengths to the hasp of the window as a warp, and copied the old design, weaving new wool into it, so that I made a pretty belt decorated with tufts of wool. I made some more, varying the colours and inventing new designs. A lady who lived in the house thought them charming and bought two. I went to see Russians in Paris, notably Princess Yusupov. Everyone thought my work very pretty, but I soon found out that I could not do my own selling: I must leave my wares with an agent who would sell them and take a commission. But there was the danger that they might be copied. Some weeks later Princess Yusupov suggested that I should go and live at her house and work exclusively for her. I should be working in her drawing rooms, Marika would be with me, and I should have a maid's attic room.

"And food?" I asked.

"You'll be able to cook your meals on a spirit-lamp."

I said that I would think about it. Three hundred and fifty francs a month, and myself, with a child: it was not much. I was making as much at Châtillon, counting Diego's hundred and fifty francs; and my daughter could enjoy the open air, and I was free – free to sing, shout, weep – and nobody could say anything.

So I continued to make my belts at home and to trust to luck to sell them in Paris. I managed in this way to make between four and five hundred francs a month, which allowed me to dress the growing child, buy what I needed for my work and to dress myself decently – all this without giving up the country air.

Meanwhile my relationship with Mme Pite had deteriorated since she realized that Rivera had begun to neglect me. She was very pious and dutiful, but very petty at bottom. For her I was only a sinner, an unmarried mother. She went for me one day about something or other, and I asked what was the good of going to confession every day and swallowing the Sacred Host if the same mouth was only to vomit out ugly, wounding words. "And then you run off that evening or next day to ask the *curé* for absolution for your sins. Better to sin a little less, and make an effort yourself to be kind and natural."

At these words Madame Pite came forward and struck me on the cheek. (I had Marika in my arms.)

"I'm sure," I said, "that now you'll feel obliged to go to the *curé* and tell him of this nasty deed of yours. Relieve yourself a little more while you're at it. I believe someone said 'Whosoever shall smite thee on one cheek, turn to him the other also'."

She turned red and, jumping up at my face (I was much the taller) she struck me again, harder still. Marika began to cry; I put her on the floor, took Mme Pite by the shoulders and shook her till her hair came down, her eyes filled with tears and her nose turned quite red. Then I told her that I should find somewhere else to live and turned her out of my kitchen.

I 2

MARIKA WAS LEARNING TO WALK AND TALK: THAT IS TO SAY she jumped and stamped in one spot, and uttered her first words, which usually all sounded like "bla-bla" or "cra-cra" or, if she saw Madame Pite, "pip-pip".

One day there was a chance to take other lodgings at Châtillon, in the middle of a big garden – fruit trees, a little shrubbery and a kitchen garden. There was no electricity or bathroom; but the rent was lower and the certainty of being alone, delivered from my bigoted hypocrite, made up for the lack of comfort. I moved in towards the end of September, and next day I ran round the garden with the baby in my arms, well wrapped up, because it was very cold. There were birds cheeping "puic-puic-puic!" on the bare branches of the trees, and the child thought this very funny. So it was still possible to be happy.

I went on with my weaving and went to Paris with Marika to sell my work myself. I knew that Rivera intended to leave for Italy. I often saw the Fishers, but I could guess that however hard I worked, living like a recluse and an exemplary mamma, they still preferred Angelina to me. It is always so: everyone is sorry for the wife and blames the mistress for upsetting the happiness of the household.

On the evening of Christmas Day – Marika was thirteen months old – I was delightedly watching her ecstasies over the tree with its lighted candles and the presents I had made for her, when there was a knock on the door. I could not help the thought flashing through my mind that perhaps Christmas had brought back the penitent papa, as happens in the tales.

And indeed there he was, with Dagusya. Dagusya who once had pulled my leg unmercifully over my “orang-outang” had now become Diego’s messenger, and he had made her the arbiter of his actions and his conscience.

Diego had brought a big plush monkey, and Marika was in raptures, although she was rather scared of Diego’s beard and his tall stature. They thought she was charming and looking very healthy.

“Do you know, Marevna, Diego intends to leave for Mexico, after a journey to Italy?” (I trembled all over when I heard the words) “He would like to know whether you’d consent to entrust Marika to him. He would take her to Mexico, where his father and mother are still living. What do you think?”

This was Dagusya’s question, asked between two gulps of tea.

“This is really very odd. Can’t Diego ask me himself? It’s not a bad idea, but the child is too small for me to let her go without me. Take us both with you. I’m losing you. I couldn’t let her go as well. There was your son, too. I should be afraid that you’d lose Marika, too, like him.”

“Now, now, *ditya* you’d have your work. You aren’t going to be a wet-nurse all your life.”

“Not all my life, no, but what I want to be sure of, before anything else, is that the child is going to live. Remember that Llie Faure assured you that your children would not live, after the little boy’s death. To make sure that Marika can stand quite steady on her own feet will take two years or three, and I will willingly devote them to her. In short, I’m ready to go with you, if you like – as nurse, that’s all, for it’s Marika I’m interested in, not you.” (A lie, but a venial one.)

“All right,” Diego replied. “I think it over, anyhow. It’s not tomorrow I’m going, but in several months, after I get back from Italy.”

On the door-step, when Dagusya had gone out, he turned and whispered loudly:

“I’ll come back tomorrow afternoon, *ditya*.”

I was glad for Marika’s sake, but I was sure that when he did come

it would be principally to see me. I had seen him looking at me during their visit; there was no doubt that six months without a sight of me had excited his sexual curiosity: his eyes shone and his lips became red and moist.

I was not mistaken: when he reappeared it was obvious that he felt newly attracted by me.

"Do you know you've changed a lot, *ditya*? I believe that now I could make something of you."

He was already talking about painting.

"Tell me," he demanded: "how do you manage to live without working at your painting?"

"You ask me that? How do you think I can work without paint or canvases? Your money only pays the rent. What you give me isn't enough for Marika and me to live on. I earn just enough for necessities: everything's going up. Here I can manage on a little, but in Paris I should need twice or three times what I earn. I wish I *were* working: you bring me canvas and paints."

He was affectionate, passionate: his presence warmed my heart and lit again in me the hope of a better future.

"Listen, Marevna: when I go I shan't be able to take you with me. I shan't have enough money. But as soon as I'm out there, if all goes as I want and as I hope, I'll write to you and send you money, and you'll come with the little girl. Or why not give her to me now? And you shall come afterwards, I swear."

I asked nothing better than to believe his promises. I had not gone to look for him: he had come back of his own accord to suggest that he should take the baby with him.

Then I suddenly thought of my father and my mother. Perhaps my father, too, had gone to see my mother and said: "Now, my dear, I'm off. It would be sensible to give me the little girl, since you've another child; so give me Manya. I'll make a future for her and she'll be happier with me than with you" – other promises, too, perhaps: that he would send for her later on when things had improved. I knew now that what Rivera said was all lies. He had left enough money for us with Fisher: this might have paid for our journey; but he knew already that once he went he would never see us again.

AT OUR NEW HOME I WORKED IN THE GARDEN. MY COUNTRY neighbours laughed at my horror of red and white earthworms: if I saw one come up out of the ground I would leave my spade and walk away shuddering. They begged me to collect them and give them to them to feed their hens; so I overcame my repugnance, and in exchange I got good advice about my gardening. I loved the life; and Marika played with a rabbit she had been given.

Weeks passed: my peas were beauties; my onions were coming up; the whole garden was flowering, including the shrubbery, and Marika and I were in magnificent health. Then one morning I recognized a tall, black silhouette coming through the garden gate. Suppressing my impulse to run and throw my arms round his neck I watched him come up to me. He had changed. He had shaved off his beard and moustache, which made him look vastly younger, but I preferred him with his beard: it gave his face more character and disguised his receding chin.

"I always find you in excellent form when I come back," he said.

"That's a good sign. And I'm always glad to see you again."

We were laughing and standing quite close to each other, ready to kiss after all the months of separation; but Marika would not let her father touch me. She started stamping and uttering piercing screams.

"Look at that!" said Diego. "That's jealousy, or I know nothing about it. Where does she get that from?"

He showed me some splendid drawings he had made in Italy.

"Where did you manage to do such marvellous things?"

"In a brothel I know. The women were glad to pose. Oh, nothing dirty or obscene, you know. No, it was natural, powerful, beautiful – like love itself."

We acquired fresh knowledge of each other. It was all beginning again. . . .

His art had developed, and I was happy. I was not jealous either of his work or of his success. I was sure that my daughter would one day be entitled to be proud of her father.

Rivera had come back at a good time: I could cook *my* peas for him and *my* new potatoes. (They were tiny: I did not know how to grow vegetables properly.) We would eat out of doors, and Marika began to get used to her father. One habit of his I remember well: at table, if the child was disobedient and I reprimanded her, Diego would say: "Don't listen to your mother: she's a fool"; and I used to think to myself that if this went on I should have my work cut out.

He used to perch Marika on his shoulders and perform a Mexican dance while he sang a song of that country. Sometimes, when she was in a good mood, he would make a drawing of her; but more often the child was jealous and, in order to have some peace, I sometimes had to take her to Mme Pite's; otherwise her father could not come near me, still less touch me: she did not allow it. Rivera told me that the jealous Marika was the spit of me, and I told him it was the other way round: the child was like him. I sometimes sat for him, too, for a water-colour or a drawing. I still loved him, but any day I expected a new breach between us, and I had to force myself to be calm and not lose my head again. We spoke no more about the journey to Mexico, and I hoped that perhaps it had been only a pretence.

My stock went up with the villagers when I told them he was the child's father; and from the mere fact of knowing he was in Paris, from seeing him nicer and kindlier than ever, I felt myself secure. I hoped that little by little he would come to believe in my affection and disinterestedness, and to love the child without any complications. And perhaps it actually would have been so if he had stayed longer in Paris.

One day, however, he arrived with serious news: his father was very ill, almost at death's door, and he must make haste if he was to see him again alive.

"You wish me to go, don't you, *dutya*?"

What woman in such circumstances would not let "her man" go, whether husband or lover? And yet after all had not all this been foreseen, almost contrived in advance? Was he afraid I should hook onto him, make violent scenes, even raise a scandal?

I bit back all my reproaches and swallowed my tears; I took the baby in my arms and said that at all events I should still have something of him to console me.

He caressed the little girl and wept: whether they were genuine tears – and he was regretting that he had become so much attached to this scrap of existence which promised to be so like him – or crocodile's tears, I cannot tell. I put the child to bed for her rest, so that she should not disturb our last farewell.

"I swear to you that as soon as things improve I'll send for you and the child to Mexico, Marevna. I hope to make a good career for myself out there, and I shan't forget the two of you, little Marika and big Marika."

He made passionate love to me for the last time, and this allayed

somewhat the sadness of our separation. Smothering my hands and lips with kisses he begged me, as a last favour, not to come to the station next day. (Need I say that I should never have dreamed of it? Expose myself to people's gaze with the baby in my arms? Play the martyr, the jilted sweetheart? Seem to be parading my revenge before Angelina and the other assembled mistresses? Never! I wanted no public scene. above all I did not want to spoil our leave-taking) The bitterness and salt of tears were mingled with our kisses, for this time I wept too, but it was less because of Diego's going than at the thought of little Marika

I let him go too easily. Counting on my own strength and on his fondness for me, I still hoped in my heart of hearts that one day everything would turn out for the best. Before he went he said he had left several thousands of francs with Lisher, telling him to give me some regularly every month. That was nice enough of him, I must say. Doubtless it was also a way of proving to those of his friends who showed their disappointment in his behaviour to the child that he was not entirely what they might think. If I had thought for a moment that my daughter would be unhappy by my fault, I should never have let Diego go so easily. I ought to have insisted, cost what it might, on his acknowledging her before he went. I was a straightforward girl myself and I trusted in his honesty. When a love affair is over there is nothing to be done about that, but when one leaves children behind one, it is one's duty to think of their destiny, their future, even if they're only girls! If my father did not give me his name the fault is mine, as I have said. I refused to change my religion and I wished also to show him that my affection for him was disinterested.

To satisfy his desires Diego was capable of any folly — of abandoning one woman for another and then going back to the first, but at last he left Paris altogether, his uneasy loves and his friends, to go back to Mexico and begin a new life, a life of great work and violent passions. It was in his own country, his own element, that he employed all his powers for the development of his miraculous genius.

If Diego was not faithful to his women he was no more constant to his Communist party. He deserted it twice, and came back almost asking for forgiveness. Perhaps it is true to say that one cannot judge him.

Diego could not remain faithful to one woman for long, but for some he could keep alive his affection and esteem. After his departure he wrote to me from Mexico City, not often but at length and affection-

apity. His father had died in 1921 after a long illness, and this was a great grief for Diego. At this time Marika, our daughter, was ill in Paris, and Diego wrote me a touching letter about his father's death, and spoke of Marika: perhaps he thought that she was going to die too. It was in this letter that he told me of his new passion for Lupe Marin and I realized that he would forsake my child and me for this woman. She divorced Diego afterwards and he married Frieda.

In his murals, which made him famous as a fresco-painter far beyond Mexico, he displayed his true love, his real passion, for his country and his people. In Europe his work was uncertain, groping. He had come under several different influences: first the Spanish school – Velasquez, El Greco, Goya (whom he greatly resembled, both physically and in his way of living); then, in Paris, Cézanne, le douanier Rousseau and the Paris school: Picasso, Gris, Braque, cubism. He said to me: "Cubism is excellent, but only as a means: it is not the true goal." He quarrelled with Rosenberg as soon as their contract was signed, which gave ammunition for several journalists to write about "the Diego Rivera affair". He abandoned cubism as he would abandon a woman from whom he had taken everything – "a means, but not a goal". He said to me: "Do pointillism for a time, but not for long – although what you are doing is good: it is not like anyone else's work." When he gave up cubism Rivera fell out with almost all his cubist friends; but if Rosenberg hoped that Diego would go to the bottom all by himself and would come and beg to be taken back, he was wrong. If Diego was weak with women, where his work was concerned he knew what he wanted, and had admiring friends who found work for him. The true road to fame Diego found in Mexico. All that he learned in Europe, in Paris, all his quests, even cubism, served him as a means of finding a real, passionate language, full of colour, and a true life, wherein he could express his ideas and his sense of creation. Diego showed also the enormous number of preparatory works which he had to execute in order to attain the capability of painting his gigantic works on the walls of Mexico City and at Detroit in the United States. This work was not always easy. There were the snares of jealousy and struggles, both with clients like Rockefeller and with governments, because of his ideas and his candour. It is a pity that he later made certain compromises, but his entourage was not always very wholesome. Too many women: that is what I reproach him with.

WEDON EHRENBURG, RETURNING FROM RUSSIA IN 1921 WITH his new wife, came to see me in the country in the middle of my vegetables, with my little daughter in my arms, he said:

"You are wrong to hide away so far off. What rôle are you playing, Marevna?"

"I'm not playing any rôle. I'm well and happy here, far away from malice and jealousy. Here I can still believe that the world is good, kind and generous. Every time I have to go to Paris about my work it's torture."

Ilya and his wife enquired what I was doing, and I explained that the hundred and fifty francs that Rivera gave me were not enough, and that I made sashes trimmed with beads; that before that I had stitched shirts and drawers for wounded soldiers at a franc apiece, till I almost made myself ill. "Lack of practice," I said.

"And your painting, Marevna?"

"Oh, I'm too poor. I've nothing to work with. I certainly can't deprive my child of food in order to buy the materials I need. If anyone would provide them for me I'd certainly work: you know I can't live without that, Ilya."

Alas! No one thought of me any more. Everyone was tired of this ordinary, commonplace woman. I was like a courtesan in decline: no more being courted, no more friends, money, presents: nothing but debts, debts everywhere. Only the Fishers remained faithful, perhaps because of the child. They, at all events, were convinced that it was Diego's child: it was too like him!

Once or twice André Delhay came to see me. Delhay would set the child astride his leg and jog her up and down. He looked at us and asked whether I was happy.

"Not completely: I badly miss painting," I said.

* * *

After Rivera went I spent some weeks more at Châtillon, doing all I could to forget. Marika was getting better and better at walking and running. She often played jokes on me, hiding among the raspberry-canecanes or gooseberry-bushes. She stuffed herself with raw fruit, picking up windfall plums and eating them, stone and all. She got herself a fine attack of enteritis, and I packed up to go back to Paris, where she could be looked after by better doctors.

I was sorry to say goodbye to my beloved country, but I would not have spent another winter alone at Châtillon for anything in the world.

Besides all the other trials I had experienced there, it sometimes happened that, as I was bent over my work late at night, I would suddenly see pressed against the window-pane a terrifying face, livid or crimson, with the nose flattened, and red eyes starting out of the head, watching me inquisitively while the mouth grimaced broadly. I was once so frightened that I stayed riveted to my work; then, plucking up courage, I managed to open a drawer and pretend to get out a revolver – it was an old pipe of Diego's – and the apparition vanished at once into the night. It was the son of an old woman, a drunkard (or perhaps the woman herself; they both lived in a hut not far away). The thought of staying there all alone with my friend gone abroad – for everything is known in the country through the gossip of the postman, the police and the neighbours – in a house built of wood, with no locks, made me tremble with fear. Besides, at night the old house came alive. There were the mice, and the empty upper rooms which creaked of their own accord. . . .

After a sleepless night with Marika at a hotel in Paris I took her to the Hospital for Sick Children, where they told me she had acute appendicitis and must be operated on at once. In great anguish I left her there and started tearing about looking for a room. In the Cité Falguère I came upon a small studio "with immediate possession", which I took. I spent another night of misery at the hotel, and next day I went to the hospital, where I found that Marika had been operated on. She was still sleeping from the effect of the anaesthetic. She lay like one dead, yellow as wax, a most beautiful little image.

I went back to the studio and set to work assembling the stove, buying coal and wood, and cleaning the place from top to bottom. It was on the ground floor and opened into the courtyard; I thought it not a bad place for the child: when she had recovered, she would be able to run about and play in the sun.

The house was full of artists' studios, and Oscar Meshchaninov, one of our friends, lived a few dozen yards away. Things would be easier here, while I tried to find somewhere better, than in a hotel room where I could neither cook nor bath the baby.

Many of my friends, who knew that I was back in Paris, went to see Marika at the hospital. She was good, and clean in bed, so she was a great success with the nurses. After a few days I could take my little angel to the Cité Falguère; but, although they might have operated successfully for appendicitis, no one had bothered about the enteritis.

I spent night after night listening to her crying. People knocked on the walls and the ceiling. She was worse than ever, and one morning early I ran to Oscar's and begged him to fetch a doctor as soon as possible.

A doctor came and prescribed treatment: I said that at the hospital no one had told me anything.

"There you are, little lady. Your baby needed an operation: they operated – very well, too. As for the enteritis, no one was interested in that. And that's the whole story of how things are done in hospital. But there's no need to be anxious: everything will be perfectly all right."

Truthfulness compels me to say that when Marika, who was then two years old, was on the point of being operated on for appendicitis, I wrote to Diego, begging him to help me. He answered that while "our" child was ill his father, old Rivera, had expired in his arms after a long illness. He protested his affection for Marika, and his grief at her sickness (and I felt from the tone of his letter that this was no lie). He went on to say that he had loving memories of me, and that his work would always bear the stamp of the glorious days he had had in Paris, thanks to me. He spoke of his painting and of his hopes for a brilliant future. He enclosed some money and begged me to send him frequent news of the child.

Neither this letter nor one which followed it contained any mention of plans for Marika and me: on the contrary, reading between the lines I divined that he was in the grip of a new love affair: "I can't work if I am not wildly in love with a woman. As at the time when I met you and was like a madman (and it was reflected in my painting) so now I can again devote myself entirely to my work." In fact it was at this time that he fell in love with Lupe Marin, whom he married.

I answered that I understood perfectly and that I was grateful to him for his frankness and begged him not to conceal anything from me in future, but not to forget us altogether; I often talked about him to his daughter, I said, in order that she might continue to love him even from far away.

After this I received nothing more from him.

When Fisher told me later of the marriage I had long suspected it, and could stand the shock.

Marika grew more and more entrancing. She danced all the time. The blood of all the races mingled in hers, Aztec, Latin, Slav, perhaps Jewish, sparkled in her veins, one might say, and gave her her sense of

fun, her fire, her charm. Gentle and winning in her early years, when she was delicate, the more she grew and developed the more her character altered.

I was going through a bad time, but I survived, thanks partly to some assistance that Oscar gave me – temporary assistance, for Oscar's notion was that I should accept his courtship of me. I was to continue working as before, however, until I had used up all my strength and with no hope of improving our life – mine and Marika's. He was fond of Marika, but he was jealous of Diego and hated him.

I began to feel that I had not the strength to go on as I was. I loved my daughter and would have liked to give her everything. People offered to keep me, saying that life would be a thousand times pleasanter and easier for Marika and me, and instead of toiling like an ordinary working woman I should be able to devote myself to my painting. (I had given it up entirely for the moment: torn between earning our bread and looking after the child I had no time for it.) But this would have meant leaving Marika with friends or boarding her out. What with physical exhaustion and anxieties of every sort, moral and financial, my health was giving way.

15

ONE MORNING OSCAR CAME TO SEE ME AND FOUND ME seriously ill and unable to speak. He fetched a doctor who sent me to hospital. I had a sore throat and the beginnings of congestion of the lungs; on top of this I was suffering from nervous depression. Oscar took Marika, which was very nice of him, but the doctor advised him to entrust her to a crèche for orphans and forsaken children: he said I should certainly have to stay in hospital for ten days or so. So while I was fighting against my illness, with only one desire, to get well as quickly as possible and be able to take my daughter out of that "horrible" house, Marika, who was only two and a half, stayed at the crèche, quite lost, poor mite.

On my last day in the hospital, Oscar arrived with a bottle of

champagne (someone had given it to him) and a steak, which he presented to the nurse, with a big bouquet, to thank her for being so kind to me. Not bad, I thought! I could not help laughing to myself at the efforts he was making. With rather less selfishness and rather more humanity he could doubtless have spared me this time spent in hospital, and I should not have been compelled to part with my child (I owed him a grudge for that)

It was the Fishers who invited me to come and finish my convalescence with them. I spent the days in bed, still without any strength, while they stuffed me with vitamins and horse- and ox-blood. What I really missed, to complete my recovery, was Marika. The thought of her took away my appetite and my sleep, so much so that one day Fisher declared that we should go and fetch her and bring her back to their house. They, at all events, had no lack of humanity or kindness, even if what they did was rather for Diego's child than for me.

When we arrived at the big, grey house with its huge courtyard dotted with a few enormous trees, I saw lots of children, all alike, all similarly dressed—pink aprons, clumping clogs, shaven heads. We sat down on a bench, waiting for Marika to be brought. After a minute we saw coming towards us a little girl with a shorn head, who looked at us nervously, slyly hanging her head, and soon began to weep great, big, slow tears. She walked more slowly and stopped in front of us—a voice shouted to me: "Here's your little girl, madame. Marika Vorobev." I fell on my knees before the little creature, who seemed to be sulking, but then suddenly burst into sobs and threw herself upon me, put her arms round my neck and cried: "Take me away, Mother! Take me away quickly—they cut off my hair!" It was true—there was nothing left of her pretty curls, and Marika's hair never again grew as curly as it had before. Besides this the great clogs had managed, in three weeks, to give her coins.

I need not say how happy I was and how grateful to the Fishers. The doctor who had come to see me when I was ill had told Oscar that my studio was an unhealthy hovel, and that it was shameful that people were allowed to let such places. Adam Fisher now said that we should not go back there, for it was too dangerous for us both. The Fishers were going to Denmark for a month and Adam invited me to stay at their house. I could look after the cat, the garden would be good for me; I should be relieved of many anxieties and, of course, if I had the strength, I should be able to find somewhere else to live in

time for their return; but there was no hurry about that: the first and most important thing was to look after myself and get my strength back.

We were very happy in the Fishers' house with its smallish garden lovingly tended and full of every kind of flower. At sunset the birds still sang in the branches of the fruit trees; the loud noise of Paris was not audible, but at times one heard a train far away, and on those fine evenings its puff-puff seemed quite close. The garden had a peace and charm quite unexpected in the suburbs of Paris. It was sad to think that we should have to leave it all so soon.

Fisher thought that "my sculptor" would certainly propose to me; but Oscar wanted a wife to bring him, if not cash, substantial connections which would be of great assistance to his career. I might be attractive and desirable, but I had no connections or influence: they were what I needed myself.

I was still at the Fishers' when they came back from Denmark and I was much embarrassed and disappointed at my vain search for somewhere to live. (I had had time to get ready some samples of my tapestry work for dressmakers and fashion houses.) Elen Fisher was going to have a baby, and suggested that we should go and stay with one of her friends, a Danish goldsmith, in the country at l'Isle-Adam. I should help the lady with the house, and Marika and I would have the benefit of the fresh air.

Not long before we left Fisher told me that now I was recovered and quite strong again, he must warn me not to expect Diego to come back, for he was marrying. I must forget him, and think only of myself and my child.

For two years I had waited for Diego, working and remaining perfectly virtuous and faithful to him: this made seven years out of my life that I had devoted to him – seven years of love and absolute fidelity which, for one of my temperament (I speak frankly) was a lot.

* * *

I went one day to the Montrouge cemetery (it was one of Diego's last requests that I should) and had the greatest difficulty in finding the grave of his little son. It was overgrown; the white cross was worm-eaten; one could hardly read the word "Diego". I asked Fisher to give me some of Rivera's money, to pay the rent for the plot and have the grave tidied up.

"Let the dead boy be, Marevna," Fisher answered. "Think first of

your daughter who is alive. There's always Angelina: it's her business to see to it, but she's not interested any more."

Perhaps this was true and right; but I was hurt by this way of arguing – as I was by Angelina's indifference.

Marika was intelligent and sensitive – too sensitive. When Tora, the Fishers' daughter, asked her where her father was, or told her that she had no father any more because he had gone away, Marika told me that she hated her for talking like this, but envied her too because she had a papa and her name was Fisher, like his, while she, Marika, bore my name and not her papa's – why?

I did all I possibly could to make her understand that this was of no importance. I never said anything unpleasant to her about her father: on the contrary. She realized quite well that I had forgiven Diego; but I felt gradually growing in her a kind of grudge against her father and against me. She heard a perpetual whispering around her: "She has no father. . . . Her father's gone away. . . . Her father hasn't acknowledged her. . . . Her father and mother weren't married. . . ." and so on and so forth. In spite of all my efforts to bring it home to her that this was a common occurrence among artists I saw her wound grow more painful, I saw her retire into herself, and revolt and kick against her father and me. I told her stories about Rivera's life to amuse her, to make her feel and know her father's personality more intimately. I spoke of his work, of his struggles; I said that if I forgave him for all that I had suffered in the last few years it was because I appreciated the power of his talent, and that often a great artist, in order to attain the purposes of his art and his career, forsakes his family and his children, since they weigh him down like too heavy chains; and if in such a case the man is at fault, it must not be held against the artist, for the latter, if he is truly great, causes one to forgive the former – more or less.

I left my samples with Elen, who promised to try to place them for me – one more kindness to her credit.

IT WAS PLEASANT AND USEFUL FOR US TO BE AT L'ISLE-ADAM. Mme Fierdingstadt, who was Dutch and a baroness, was a very tall, thin woman with a rather unpleasing expression. If she lacked charm it was when she was in a bad mood; the moment she laughed her face became young and pleasanter. She had great, bony hands and big, masculine feet; but her hair was splendid and so was her colour. Her husband was gay and delightful. He had a pleasant face, light-blue eyes and curly hair; he was tall and well set up. Unfortunately he limped: the 1914 war had cost him a leg, and with his artificial one he could not easily walk and run with Elka, their little daughter. Elka was as fair as Marika was dark, with two pink spots on her plump cheeks. They were both of the same age.

Everything at l'Isle-Adam went well – except the day when Madame boiled one or two glasses in the same saucepan as the potatoes. Of course, the glasses cracked in the boiling water, and this made the husband laugh. He made fun of the education of his wife, who spoke Greek, Latin, German, French and English and was very knowledgeable about classical music, but who, during her whole youth, had found neither time nor means to learn anything practical, and could neither sew nor cook nor look after a child.

They often started quarrelling at table and each in turn would call on me to witness their respective martyrdoms. I was sorry for them both: usually I took the wife's side, but on some occasions I saw most clearly the meanness of her nature. I realized in her a middle-class woman's narrow education: she was parsimonious, narrow-minded for all her learning; and then it was the husband I was sorry for, the artist who must sometimes feel stifled in that atmosphere. Fortunately he could take refuge in his studio at the end of the garden; one seldom saw him then except at meal times.

One day – again we were at table – the conversation fell upon the war of 1914. M. Fierdingstadt asseverated that Jews were all funks. I replied that this was not true: I knew plenty of Jews who had fought and been wounded. Kishng, for example, had been very brave and had come back from the war with a wound, as it happened.

To which he answered with a laugh: "Kishng" Yes, he certainly was wounded – but because I shoved my bayonet into his behind when he refused to march."

Then, seeing me surprised and a good deal galled at this way of

talking of the Jews, he went on: "Are you hurt, Marevna? But you're not a Jewess, and . . ."

I retorted that I was fond of the Jewish race because of their many qualities; that after all we were nearly all partly Jewish and that in any case we certainly could not do without them since they were very intelligent, provident and sensitive to all the arts.

He did not agree with me.

My memory of l'Isle-Adam was for the most part delightful. Sometimes we got lost in the great forest or walked down to the Seine to watch the flow of its green waters. I did no painting; I did only a few tapestry samples for my return to Paris. I believe I was still unwell.

When we went back to Paris at the end of the summer we had to live in a hotel again to begin with. Then Fisher found me a room in the rue St-Jacques, in a sanatorium, a room where Marika and I could have the use of the big terrace which ran the whole length and breadth of the building, opposite the Cochin hospital. Fisher thought this would be an ideal place for Marika and me to live - and indeed there was a swimming pool and hot and cold showers: it was perfect, and I could even get my meals from the sanatorium kitchen.

It was only later that I found it was a clinic *de luxe* for venereal diseases, for the treatment of gentlemen and sons of influential fathers who had caught a clap or something more serious in the Quartier Latin or during their military service - or perhaps from a somewhat imprudent married woman who had passed onto them a present which she had had from an inconstant husband. It also received moribund patients whom the hospital opposite refused to take in: the victims of abortionists, alcoholics, people with the itch, consumptives. The medical staff was composed exclusively of foreigners, whose papers did not license them to practise: young Greek doctors, American, Spanish and Russian, except the medical superintendent, the "great doctor" Madeuf, who was a pure Frenchman from the Auvergne.

The two years I spent in that house have left a sting in my memory. My stay finished one day in a real battle between the "great doctor" and myself. I seized him by the beard with one hand and with the other I used a big brush to smear him with some lime which happened to be in the passage within my reach. Through the half-open door I could see the wife of Zak the painter watching the scene. Other lodgers were nervously doing the same. Nobody flew to my aid, to deliver me from

this Koshchêi the Deathless. My turn came and he snatched the brush and daubed me with it. There we stood facing each other, white with rage and lime.

The old man had sought every occasion to pick a quarrel with me, in order to be able to turn me out, since the day when I had told his wife that he had made advances to me. After that they were allied against me. He was an old woman-chaser, although his wife was far from ugly and was about twenty years younger than he. To start with he had been very nice to Marika and me; but little by little his effrontery increased and he began to pat me "paternally" on the thigh and behind. I disliked this intensely. He told me that I was taking life too hard. Eventually I left these dubious quarters, baggage and all, and went back to a hotel near the Place d'Italie, in the rue Philippe de Champagne, where the air was good and there was a big public garden to which I could take Marika and work at my tapestry while I kept an eye on her.

Not long before a Mme Renée Dubosq, a friend of Anna Orlov, the celebrated woman sculptor, had seen Marika at Mme Orlov's and had conceived an intense desire to adopt her. She had heard through Orlov of my laborious life and the difficulties I was experiencing in bringing my child up alone. Anna told me of this fashionable lady's wish and warmly advised me to accept her offer. Anna had a child of her own, a poor little creature, delicate, in consequence, apparently, of the Spanish influenza, which had carried off the father in three days, and left Anna a widow with a growing child which was misshapen and needed a great deal of care. The poor woman had great difficulty in carrying on, but, fortunately for her her husband, when he died, had been a driver for the American army, and neither the widow nor the child had been abandoned. She was given assistance and received a pension. Her works were bought and big commissions were passed to her which enabled her to look after her child and, later on, to bring it up in better surroundings. When Rivera had spoken to me of her he used to say: "To think that you've nothing more important to do than behave like her, dragging her horrible kid about and displaying it everywhere, begging for pity and for money. It's disgusting!" But I understood Anna: I told myself that I should be capable of doing the same if my child were ever in great danger. At such times pride and self-respect are soon swept away. However, I wished to struggle on and bring up my daughter in my own way so I declined Mme Dubosq's

offer. I told Anna that it would be better if the lady found me work, a lot of work, so that I might do what ought to be done for my child. I did not want to turn Marika either into a respectable grand lady, or a well-dressed little prig, but into a being who might suffer but who would purchase at the price of this a sense of humanity, a depth of soul, the vital soul of an artist, unencumbered by the prejudices and hypocrisy which I saw too many of the children and young girls of the *haute bourgeoisie* decked out in.

Some years before this, when Marika was just three, one of my friends, Christine, the friend and secretary of Isadora Duncan, had suggested taking her to the studio where the great dancer's best pupil gave lessons – Margot (whom Isadora had adopted as her daughter). The three of us went and, when she saw Margot, a fragile, airy being, showing her pupils plastic, rhythmic movements, Marika did not conceal her delight. With some shyness she performed a small representation of a child walking in a field among flowers and butterflies, then, tired out, lying down and going to sleep. She did it so gracefully, so truly to life, that Margot told me that she would willingly accept such a beautiful and talented little girl as a pupil, even if I had not the means to pay for her to take the course; whereupon Christine offered to pay for the first month of lessons.

Christine was mad about dancing; she was tall, thin and masculine-looking, with her tousled hair and her big nose that had twice been operated on in consequence of a bite from a spider which had spoilt it; she had black, shining eyes like olives, full of sweetness and intelligence, and a thin humorous mouth. Everything about her was comic and attractive. She was an old maid – or rather an old bachelor in skirts; and it was thanks to her that Marika could go with me twice a week to Passy to do rhythmic dancing. This lasted till Margot left for America. Two or three months after her return the poor woman was carried off by galloping consumption. I missed her badly: she it was who gave Marika her first lessons, even if she did go to two other schools afterwards. Perhaps it is thanks to Margot that all her life she has kept the lightness and suppleness, the harmony of movement, that is not always to be found in classical dancing.

About this time it was found necessary to remove Marika's tonsils and adenoids. Mme Dubosq was rather vexed that I had decided on this without asking her advice, but suggested sending Marika to Ris-Grangis, to the house of one of her former servants, now married,

who had room for a girl of this age. I was not entirely satisfied with the arrangements for, when the son came back from his military service, Marika would have to share his room; but I knew that a child forgets very quickly and can soon adapt itself to a new life. The important thing was that she would regain her strength and be able to go on dancing.

17

ABOUT THIS TIME THE GREAT INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION of decorative art was being got ready in Paris. A good number of my former artist-comrades came from Russia to oversee the building of the Russian Pavilion: they all had become People's Commissars of Fine Arts. They told me how sorry they were that I had been unwilling to go back to the U.S.S.R.: everything would have been quite different for me. They invited me to exhibit my handicraft, and I was given a big glass window in a hall in the Russian Pavilion, and the opportunity of exhibiting in the stalls adjoining it. I was also given work for some weeks or a month, for which I was paid fifty francs a day; and very glad I was to have it, for it meant that I could pay my part of Marika's board (Mme Dubosq was determined to pay the rest), and buy some clothes for the child and for myself, too. I could go and see Marika every Sunday: her colour was good, and she was lively and gay.

My exhibits were very successful: tapestry work, handbags, belts, shawls, trimmings for frocks and overcoats, all sold quickly to Russians as well as French. I was nearly given a medal but finally my name was struck off the list for fear of arousing jealousy among the real Russians from Russia.

One day when I was visiting Marika she told me some things about the son of the family, now back from his military service, which alarmed me. She said that he would tickle her at bedtime and in the morning, and also used to expose himself to her. I took her away at once - I think now that things were less serious than I believed; but it was impossible to get at the truth - in spite of the foster-mother's

abuse and insulting behaviour. The Fishers thought I had acted too hastily, and it is possible that the woman was really fond of Marika. I had given up for a smaller one the big room at the Hotel de la Paix in the rue Philippe de Champaigne and, now that Marika was back, I was sorry I had. One day, when Marika, who had caught a chill, was in bed, there was a knock at the door. It was a Dr Germain and his wife, who had liked what I was showing at the exhibition and had asked to be introduced to me. They thought our quarters too small, especially for a child, and said that she looked pale. I explained about her operation, and said that she had only just come back after six weeks in the country. My surprise may be imagined when Dr Germain at once suggested that we should spend the summer at Taussat, their place near Arcachon.

"You'll like it enormously, and you'll be able to get some rest yourself; it will do the little girl infinitely more good than the country round Paris. Of course we shall pay your fares. That's settled, then! We shall expect you."

Marika and I bounced up and down on the bed: to live in the sun, among trees, by the seaside, wallow in the hot sand, soak ourselves in the sea!

When they left us the Germaines had bought at a reasonable price a woollen cloak that I had woven. While we were waiting, they sent me now and then provisions from their property at Mios: new-laid eggs and honey from their own hives. Life was beginning to look up.

For about three years I had been painting seriously again, urged on by the faithful Zamaron and other friends of mine, and above all by the need I felt for it. My handicraft bought my bread and butter and was at least interesting: after all, the designs were my own; but it was terribly hard, thankless work. Painting was a real means of expressing myself and, more than that, of getting away from anything to do with trade, money, customers (women above all: those impossible women). My style had not altered but, instead of confining myself to water-colours, I had now ventured upon oils. (I had earned enough to buy paints and canvases.) I painted in little specks, in complementary colours. Later on I made full use of greys and blues, and contrived to give transparence and depth to my landscapes, and true freshness and purity to children's faces and to nudes, even producing the texture of the skin. But I could not master composition: even if the outline was good, if the heads of children and women were painted

with sensitiveness, I still lacked something. The critics thought my line firm and accurate, but they said that my technique was too subtle and meticulous and deprived my style of painting of all spontaneity. Pointillism was no longer a new discovery, and people were much less interested in it; moreover people who were less well instructed about art thought my painting too modern, because the colours were unmixed and very daring and the line was bold and not classical. I did sell some pictures, but only to collectors who appreciated my style and had a liking for the nude. I hoped I should be able to put more energy and power into my pictures, but all my life – I see it now – has been nothing but a perpetual battle against all sorts of obstacles put in the way of my art. If it was not paints that I lacked it was brushes or frames or canvases. Yet I never lost courage. My father's words always sounded in my memory: "Patience and hard work always win."

18

THE GERMAINS' COUNTRY HOUSE WAS CLOSE TO THE SEA, which went out a very long way at low water and left behind it trails of black and dark-green seaweed and a strong smell of iodine. The house was surrounded by splendid giant pines; one could see the sea through them in one direction and in the other a few houses, all some distance off. Juliette, Mme Germain that is, was a symphony in pink and gilded russet. Her sky-blue eyes, alive and shining, lit up a face which was naturally pink but had been tanned by the sun. Freckles and glorious golden hair made her look somewhat Flemish. She had a loud laugh which displayed her beautiful teeth – "a she-wolf's teeth", I told myself. She was of middle height, well set-up, with strong muscles and an extremely delicate, velvety texture of skin.

Her husband, the doctor, despite his shortness, had much more of a way with him. He was remarkable both as a man and as a doctor. He was the mayor of the little *commune* of Mios where he and his family lived for ten months of the year and where he practised. He genuinely

loved the arts and was interested in artists and their way of living, and helped them in every possible way. He was passionately fond of his wife, whom he had married for love when he was only a medical student, and he tried to make every sort of allowance for their different outlooks derived from their very different backgrounds. He had a life-long ambition (which he later realized) to build an observatory. He was also fond of his native region of France, where he lives to this day, his vines, his bees and their hives – and, of course, his children.

When he and his wife had one of their sudden, frightful scenes about little or nothing, she would go crimson with anger and shout at him while he would calmly pick up his hat, his boots and a sack and go off to collect oysters at low water, or, if the tide was in, he would get into a boat with the children and sail away. At these times he seldom answered his wife, and I admired his common sense and good manners. I also liked his kindness to children, and I include Marika. To me, too, his behaviour was good-natured and perfectly correct.

I worked hard at my weaving while I was staying with the Germaines, and I have kept a grateful memory of Juliette, who took great trouble to sell my products to help me save a little money for our return to Paris.

One day I started on a portrait of Loulou and of Poupette, the smaller girl. Juliette exclaimed that she had never known that I was such an expert as that; whereupon she also sat for her portrait.

"What a goose you are," she said. "If I had known you could paint portraits I could have got you commissions down here; but now all our friends have gone to Bordeaux."

I was sorry then that I had been shy; but I preferred selling my woven work to making bad portraits of people who wanted only a photographic likeness.

19

THE DAY CAME FOR US TO LEAVE AND, AN HOUR BEFORE WE went to take the train, Dr Germain suddenly asked whether I was willing to let him have Marika for the winter.

I was quite flabbergasted, and had a great struggle before I could

decide that it would be much better for Marika and that I must not be selfish.

When I returned to Paris in the autumn I had some money, and time to look round me for customers. I had had enough of working for undependable, jabbering women, and I determined to work on cravats and to try to sell them at gentlemen's shops.

It was at this time that I met a young Breton woman who came to see me and bought one of my cravats. She wrote to me soon afterwards saying that one of her friends, J.P., a picture dealer, had seen it and would like to buy some for himself and his mother. She gave me his address and I took some things for him to look at; thus was born a friendship which lasted until quite recently.

Now that I can look back calmly on the past I wonder whether I was not mistaken about J.P.'s view of me. I have always somewhat mistrusted men, but my impetuosity, my vitality and my natural tendency to idealize people and to make allowances for them have given me more than one surprise. When I first went to see him he took me for an eccentric American woman who was interested in modern painting; and he gave me a warm welcome. He always did remain nice, merry and a good comrade; but when later he gave up his small gallery for a bigger one, which increased his importance, he became more of a cynic and a libertine. This attitude of his was one of the things over which we fell out. I blamed him for being inconsiderate and a woman-chaser, and he reproached me with my ridiculous prudery and for taking him too seriously.

My early memories of the little gallery are gay and amusing. We enjoyed ourselves like schoolchildren, both behaving as though we were much younger than we were. My own days were stultifying: I spent them calling at the big dressmakers', Chanel, Worth, Lanvin and so on, to leave orders and get others which I would fulfil at home with the help of two young Russian women who did not know a great deal. They were new to the trade and I should often have preferred to be on my own. When J.P. wanted to relax after a hard day's work he would telephone my hotel and come and spend a few hours talking and eating caviare sandwiches and drinking vodka. One evening this tall, thin fellow with the laughing eyes became my lover. We sometimes went out to dine at one of the famous restaurants or went to the theatre or the Grand Guignol, and finished the evening at a night-club.

These evenings were entertaining, and showed me a quite different

world in which people enjoyed themselves madly without prejudice or prudery. He was greatly flattered to see me admired when I was with him. "You look very like Sarah Bernhardt when she was young," he said. I replied that I had been told that I was more like Colette – and this was true too.

He helped to pay my two assistants. (Evil tongues spread it about that he was spending a fortune on me.) By way of thanking him I gave him one day two pictures by Rivera that I was very fond of. To please my daughter he later gave me back the smaller picture, but the more remarkable one he kept and, thinking of all the money he spent on me – on us – I am glad.

It was a long time since someone had spoilt me, and I developed a taste for night life. At five or six in the morning we would go to a little bar and drink good, hot coffee. Sometimes we spent the night in J.P.'s gallery, lying down as well as we could on the armchairs. Or after the performance at the cinema or theatre we would stroll along the boulevards among the idle, perfumed crowds. We were brushed against by women of a suspicious elegance, very much made up and disturbingly scented.

J.P. often talked to me of modern painting and its exponents. "The history of art has never known a greater genius than Picasso. He has some equals, but no superiors. The mistake the public makes is to regard these modern works as though they were riddles to which the key must be found." J.P. was mad about Picasso; I talked to him of Rivera's work, their stormy friendship and the rivalry between them while Rivera was still in Paris.

20

ONE DAY J.P. CAME TO TELL ME THAT HE HAD FOUND ME A big, new studio with a kitchen, a garret room and a balcony – a dream, in short.

"This is a bit of luck for you, Marevna. Start painting and having useful people to see you, even if you don't like them. You must be

enterprising and go-ahead if you want your work to be known in Paris society, for those people are only interested in art if they know the artist" — all too true.

Sometimes he asked why I did not become a courtesan.

"Everything would be different. You've all the necessary qualifications: beauty, temperament, intelligence, and what's more, you like love."

I saw then that he had quite misunderstood my disposition, and this grieved me. I replied, half teasingly, that all he knew were the little tarts from Montmartre and Montparnasse, and that the era of the courtesan was over. I was not fit to be a courtesan, I said, because I did not much care for money and if I liked love I did not like men at all. My father had brought me up like a boy, and no doubt this was why I preferred fighting with men while making love.

At last I moved into my splendid new studio in the rue Decrès. It was simply furnished but comfortable. J.P. sent me a picture dealer, a friend of his whom I already knew slightly. It was said that he was a bit crazy since he had caught syphilis, and that he was addicted to drugs, a habit he had picked up abroad. This did not prevent his doing good business in Paris, which was swarming with foreigners, mostly Americans who would pay insane prices for pictures. This man asked me how many pictures I could paint in a month: I answered that this depended a good deal on what kind of picture I was to paint, and that in any case I could not work fast at a work of art. He said then that I must push myself ahead more, and invited me to become his mistress. J.P. had told him much about me and had said that I was charming. "Think it over," he said. "You've everything to gain." I was completely taken aback. I had thought myself so fortunate in being set up by J.P. in this studio, and now I was quite bewildered and perturbed by this creature's proposal, which another woman artist would doubtless have found very tempting. What bothered me was the realization that J.P. knew about it. For my part I should rather have eaten a crust of bread rubbed in garlic than have entertained such a proposal. When I told J.P. about it he laughed and said: "There you are: along with the studio you will have a very rich dealer and a friend who will be able to supply your needs and will be your protector too. My dear Marevna, I think I should marry. I am tired of this nomadic, bohemian life, and my health is beginning to give way. But I shall always be a friend you can count on; so think of your future, your career." To

conceal my agitation I said to him in my gentlest and most coaxing voice: "I shan't be able to replace you so soon, J. I am much attached to you. I should prefer working at my tapestry to taking a lover who is in such precarious health." He smiled and replied that all illnesses can be very efficiently cured nowadays, and that my fears had no foundation. I left J.P., shocked at his cynicism and wondering whether he wanted to do me a good turn or whether this was not a pretext for getting rid of me.

He went on seeing me as before, and one evening we went to Pascin's, whom I did not know. Every Saturday his studio was full of people, artists, journalists, art-critics, picture-dealers, Pascin's own models and a constellation of little strumpets, pretty and amusing. Pascin gave a warm welcome to everyone and, with his oriental *insouciance* and his good taste, everybody liked him.

"This is one of the most charming men I know," said J.P. when he introduced us. "He loves all women and women worship him." Pascin looked at me with his little black eyes and said: "I like Slav women: come when you like." And he added to J.P.: "Where did you come on her? She's delightful." It was at Pascin's that I made the acquaintance of many people of talent in the artistic world; but I thought in my heart that Pascin would not last: that one day he would go mad.

One evening J.P. and I went to the Cirque Médrano accompanied by a young man whom J.P. had introduced to me by the name of Miró. J.P. told me that he was his discovery and that he was staking him, because he was certain that he was going to be a great painter. During the show I often glanced at the young Spaniard, who did not talk and seemed to be sunk in contemplation of something. His light-blue, child's eyes, his pink face and red lips made him look all innocence and seriousness. J.P., beside him, looked like a worn-out giant. Miró said only a few sentences during the evening, and J.P. said to me: "He doesn't talk much, but he's more loquacious in his painting – and what painting it is!" I saw his work later and I was completely conquered. It was abstract painting in its infancy, and I understood why Miró did not talk. Later on J.P. gave me a charming canvas of Miró's, and from Pascin I had a water-colour showing an old bawd presenting two naked little girls to a seated old gentleman.

Dr Germain was good enough to say that I might spend the summer holidays near Marika, and we spent a truly happy six weeks at Cap

Ferret. I taught her to row; she quickly turned brown, like me, and we were called "the two negresses from Montparnasse". One day, of course, I saw that my purse was growing lighter; and so we had to go back to Paris.

21

I THOUGHT THAT MARIKA OUGHT TO BE GOING TO SCHOOL, as she had at Mios; so I entered her at a public elementary school near where we were living. To begin with I went with her every morning and fetched her in the afternoon. She was decently dressed and wore good shoes; she was very sweet, but it was not long before she began to complain about her school-fellows.

"They call me 'the Russian' or 'the Mexican', and they ask where my father is, and what he does, and why he lives so far away. They ask whether you're married too, and they think you're nice, but comic."

Oh, the cruelty of children! Clearly it was not going too well at the school. One afternoon, one of the teachers came – to see the child's "environment", of course. Everything looked all right: I was working.

"It's a nice place you have here, Madame Vorobév," she said; "and your little girl's very sweet. Only in one thing she refuses to obey me: she won't let me teach her to draw. 'My mamma is a painter,' she says, 'and she knows more about it than you do, Madame.' That is why I have come to see your painting, and also to tell you that at the school painting is compulsory: your child must be obedient and do as the others do. I can't very well give way to her before the others."

I told her that I could not compel Marika to learn drawing at school, and did not want to. I said that the principles that I had learned at the Tiflis *lycée* were different: I had been left quite free.

"That is not possible with us," she retorted.

"In that case, mademoiselle," I said, "I am infinitely sorry for my child's sake; but she shan't go on going to the school: she shall work at home. She is only seven and a half, but I should not be willing to distort whatever taste for drawing she might have. I hope that one day

she will be a painter, like her father and myself. Her father is famous already."

To make up for this Marika rediscovered an enormous enthusiasm for rhythmic dancing lessons with an old Russian lady who lived at Passy. I went with her whenever my work allowed me to and it made me proud to see how much better Marika was than the other children, Russian and French: how much more thoroughbred she looked. Obviously it was observed that she had been "given a good start". People were always whispering: "That one – the little dark one: who is she? What a pretty child. How graceful she is, and so nice too." They were told that she was a little Russian, but the instructress put this right.

"No," she said. "She's Mexican, the daughter of two artists. Her father has a famous name in the Americas, and her mother – there she is: her paintings are remarkable; I am sitting for her at this moment. The child will go far, if she goes on working regularly."

The dear Germaines carried Marika off to spend another winter with them, and I was left all alone. I might as well admit, I thought, that I cannot provide her with all that a child of that age needs, and will need more and more – material security, education. Dancing is all very well; and learning to draw is the best thing she can do; and of course I can show her the difference between good and evil, teach her lovingkindness and a sense of duty, implant a kind memory of her father, in spite of her growing rebelliousness and her grudge against her future as a fatherless child (all due to his own cowardliness and selfishness); but who could know whether the grudge was not already directed at me?

22

WHILE MARIKA WAS AT MIOS THERE WAS A FEARFUL ACCIDENT in our hotel. In a small room on the floor above me there lived a prostitute. We often heard shouts coming from her room, and an infernal row, as she quarrelled with her temporary customers – generally Arabs, who sometimes refused to pay. (This was one of the

reasons why I was glad when Marika went to Miso.) One Sunday I was sitting at my table with my legs wrapped in a blanket, drawing and enjoying the quiet—though not the biting cold which was gradually getting me down (the central heating was nothing to write home about). Suddenly I heard a shout from upstairs. I no longer paid attention to this sort of noise: one finally gets used to anything. A hoarse voice was shouting something incomprehensible, and I remember thinking how tedious it was to have neighbours who were so often drunk and a nuisance. Then heavy, jerky footsteps came down the stairs, while the woman's voice, hollow, but distinct this time, called: "Help! Help!"

"There you are," I said to myself. "She's having another fight with a chap who's pulling her hair out."

I did not budge: I was not going to leave my warm blanket. By now the steps had reached the yard. At the same time there was a smell of burning. In the house nobody was moving any more than I was.

"Help! FIRE!" the woman screamed.

Like a flash I left my paraphernalia and rushed to the window. I opened it and saw a great blazing torch: the woman was on fire all over. She had stopped screaming—no wonder. It was I, now, who screamed—so loudly that the ground-floor windows opened and other people saw the wretched woman too. Everyone started tearing out with carpets and mats to throw on top of the poor creature, while I shouted that they ought to spray her with water first.

There was a pump in the yard and a long hose close by: so they sprayed her and then rolled her in the carpets, on the ground. Her hair was quite charred off.

"You must pull her clothes off!" I shouted again. "Perhaps they're still alight for all you've done."

"She'd be chilled, poor dear," some voices replied.

By now the yard was full of people: there was even a policeman, the son of the landlady. A taxi was fetched to take the woman to the nearest hospital. I quickly went upstairs to see what was going on there—fortunately! Everyone was too busy down below to give a thought yet to the cause of the fire. Everything in the little attic room was burning: on the floor lay an overturned spirit-lamp and an iron. The woman must have been ironing her underclothes (very pretty underclothes, I may say) and upset the lamp as she moved about the room. She had been wearing a flannel dressing-gown, which had caught fire at once. She was taken by surprise—and perhaps was also rather fuddled

already — so that she had started shouting too late and not loud enough. I had heard her, but had not understood what she meant. I took a slop-pail and threw water onto everything that was burning — carpet, dressing-table and window-curtains, and the bed. Thanks to there being a tap on the landing I finally succeeded in putting out all the flames; and still no one came upstairs.

I was trembling so much that I no longer felt the cold; I retreated to my room and fell onto my bed to get my breath back. It was only then that I heard the landlady and the others running up to the floor above. They found the fire out, though thick smoke was still coming from the room. The landlady came down, knocked at my door, still looking ghastly, and asked me who had put out the fire. I said that I had but, when she began thanking me, I replied that I wished I had gone to the assistance of the poor woman who was shouting for help, and got her out, rather than have refused to let myself be disturbed, as had been the case.

"It's given me a shock, this business," I said.

"Oh, my poor lady: these creatures always come to a bad end. If it's not one thing it's another. When I think that if you hadn't put out the fire this whole floor would probably be in flames now! Everything here is so old. What do you expect, with that trade of hers? It's the least that might have happened to her. Well, all that's left for me to do now is to write to her daughter. A telegram will be better. *Ah là là!* How unlucky! And if that was all: but there's the expense too!"

The woman died of her burns during the night. Although the flannel dressing-gown, which had been left on her under the heap of carpets while she was being moved to hospital, had been damped, the stuff had gone on burning.

23

FOR A LONG TIME MY CONSCIENCE WOULD NOT LET ME REST. At nights I thought I heard screams and footsteps on the stairs. I could not sleep, and I used to take refuge at the Dôme, or sometimes,

on a Saturday, I went to Kisling's; but eventually I gave up going there and stayed at the café, either with Ehrenburg and his new wife and their friends, or with Fontenoy and his wife, a Dutchwoman who painted and was said to be very talented.

Evenings at Kisling's were very lively and gay. If in spite of this I refrained from going there too often, it was because I did not wish to relapse into the surroundings I had known during the war. However, I have a pleasant memory of one of these evenings because it was so funny. I can see myself now, climbing the staircase leading to the painter's studio. (This was in the rue Joseph-Bara, where Dagusya was to live later on.) I heard laughter and the hubbub of many voices. One would have said that all was jollity. I had hardly reached the door and knocked than silence fell. I opened it, and was greeted by a Jewish dirge. Before me stood a kind of catafalque illuminated by two candelabra, each holding seven candles. In the middle lay an open book. One could guess that on some white linen a small body lay stretched out, covered by a sheet. Thinking that perhaps I had come to the wrong floor, I turned to my left, and there I saw a huge sofa; on this, and at the foot of it on the carpet, were crowded the master of the house and all his guests. They kept their grave expressions and went on singing a striking, lugubrious Hebrew threnody.

I felt ridiculous and very unwelcome before this ritual display. Who had died? Who was the little child lying there in the studio which had witnessed so many crazy gatherings and famous orgies? I was about to withdraw when Kisling in a melancholy voice asked me to consent to put my signature on a page of the great book, which I hastened to do, not without taking a squint at the little corpse. I must say I did not feel at all comfortable.

"Poor little girl!" Kisling went on in the same tone. "The poor little thing is dead! We are assembled here to weep over her. She was beautiful, she was amusing. But her curiosity, her gluttony were indeed too great. She loved, she suffered, and she is dead. Peace be to her soul. . . ."

Upon this laughter rang out all over the room. Of course I must have had a very odd expression: Kisling led me by the arm to the catafalque. He threw back the sheet, and to my great surprise disclosed the corpse of a striped cat – a pretty big one, I must admit. It was the painter's own cat whose unwholesome curiosity had led it to eat his paints. It had been unable to digest them and had begun to swell and

swell; and one fine morning it had been found dead, with its little mouth still smeared with paint.

"He didn't give it enough to eat, so what could he expect? It guzzled his palette," said Hayden, a tall, swarthy Polish artist, whose nose had a good deal of curve in it.

"What shall we do with the stiff 'un now?" asked Kisling.

"The best thing," someone suggested, "would be to take it round to the café at once, and leave it with the cashier, well wrapped up, and give the name of some customer for them to deliver it to. But whose?"

"Ehrenburg's," said Kisling with a laugh.

I protested vehemently.

"Oh, you shut up!" he answered. "Think of his face when he opens the parcel! It'll be too funny!"

But before leaving they started drinking and singing again. Every Jack had his Jill. Max Jacob was lying on the carpet with a very good-looking young man – a poet, if I remember rightly. In short, it was a somewhat spirited requiem mass.

"I say, Hayden, what's this?" Kisling called. "You alone, and Marevna too? Come on, look after each other."

Hayden obediently turned to me, took me by the arm and tried to pull me towards him. I was furious and shook it as hard as I could; I tore myself out of the clutches of that thin, muscular fellow, leaving the embroidered sleeve of my blouse in his hand. I ran out, and tumbled down the stairs; I was already at the bottom when someone called to me from upstairs and threw me down my sleeve. I arrived at the café like that and had to ask Fontenoy's wife to sew it – somehow or other to my blouse while I still wore it.

I could tell tales of other evening parties, as over-excited and as "stimulating" as that one, but I prefer to keep silence about them. In the years of my youth, both at Tiflis and at Moscow, our innocence and temperateness were never shocked by a close sight of such a gang of artists as those who swarmed in Montparnasse at the time I am speaking of. I know that at all events neither Rivera, nor Picasso, nor Matisse, Braque, Derain, Vlaminck, when I knew them, went in for this sort of orgy.

There comes a moment in life when one sees most distinctly what to avoid, what can only disfigure and enfeeble soul and mind. I want no other example than Max Jacob himself who finally escaped from this hell to take refuge in quietness and rectitude – apparently, at all

events. Max Jacob was an enthusiast, a mystic. If I saw him at his basest, no doubt he was already about to raise himself to the highest. I was always sure that he would not be able to crawl like a worm for long. I have been told that he died a saintly death, a martyr of the Second World War.

24

MAX JACOB WAS MODIGLIANI'S BEST FRIEND AND I USED TO see him with Pablo Picasso shortly before the war of 1914 at the Rotonde or Rosalie's *crémérie*, or on the boulevard Montparnasse. They always looked as though they were in fancy dress, and produced a great sensation wherever they went. I thought they were clowns or jockeys, and had a good laugh at my mistake when I asked their names. They were both clean shaven, which was fairly rare at that time, and when they were in Paris they dressed with great eccentricity. Picasso looked like an actor, and fascinated people with his magnetic eyes. He is a Catalan, part bull, part lion, with the handsome profile of a Greek statue, and a beautiful voluptuous mouth. Diego Rivera told me that he was capable of terrible hatreds, but "the most intelligent man of this century? Pablo, *parlé!* He's sensitive, cunning and skilful; and he's a genius at drawing. He wanted to be taken for a great painter, and he succeeded; but he's more of a surrealist poet than a painter." Diego admired him, and said that it was Max Jacob who encouraged Picasso to write and that under Picasso's influence Jacob began to paint.

Picasso wore a long, ample checked coat, a big cap, and gaudy ties and scarves. In town Max Jacob wore a black bowler hat on his shaven head, which made him look, quite wrongly, like an official. He had very fine eyes, and from under this ordinary bowler what extraordinary glances he darted, to everyone's fascination, for his regard was full of slyness, irony, sweetness and real gaiety. He wore a black cloak, but later on he affected a well-cut, grey greatcoat, ties of a different colour for every day of the week, white gloves, spats and,

finally, a top hat and an eyeglass! All this entirely transformed him. For ceremonial evenings, the Russian or Swedish ballet, Max put on evening dress, enveloped himself in a black cloak, and wore a grey opera hat and patent-leather shoes. In spite of his small stature he was stately and had the grand manner. But how much torment and sadness there was under this rather music-hall dandyism. I used to wonder when he was himself. Which Max Jacob was the real one: the man in the top hat and eyeglass, or the one with the beret comically perched on his hairless head? Was it when he was nice, obliging, gentle, and sometimes quite shy? Or when he was rattling away like a light woman, cursing his friends or his enemies, laughing, joking, worldly, biting and ironical? When I saw him at Kisling's I saw him from quite near: he was thirty-eight and still well set-up; but in the evenings he used to powder himself, to conceal the ravages of time and soften his features. I saw his shining skull and his big nose, his wide mouth with thin, sensual lips, and the long pointed chin like Punch himself.

We used to talk about painting (cubism, of course), and Apollinaire's modern poetry; and sometimes Jacob improvised parodies on himself and his friends, and they were good ones, and very funny indeed. He joked, and made fun of everybody. Kisling said to me one evening: "He's cracked, you know, and a dirty dog. He's turned Catholic, but look how he behaves, the swine! And yet, if I asked him for his best coat, he'd give it to me for nothing." Kisling laughed. "But he has a weakness for a good-looking boy. He says he saw Christ in his room, very handsome and smart. Sounds likely! He takes drugs, you know; and if I was Christ I would not go into Max's room: no fear!" Other people told me that Max Jacob had visions of Christ. In his work *La défense de Tartuffe* he says that when he was growing up he would go, when he was in the dumps or ill, into Catholic churches to look for comfort. I believe he had not ceased thinking of God and Christ: especially Christ who represents love and forgiveness, while God is judgment and punishment – which is hell. Max Jacob had a horrible fear of hell. He tried to be baptized, but did not succeed. He wept and tormented himself so much that at last he discovered a church specially founded for the conversion of Jews, Notre Dame de Sion, in the rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, behind the boulevard Montparnasse. He was baptized on 10 February, 1914, and received the name of Cyprian. Picasso, who stood godfather, wanted him to be given the name of Fiacre, after the patron saint of gardeners, but

Jacob refused indignantly. And then I saw this new Catholic at Kisling's, lying on the ground in lascivious postures (not to say more) with a good-looking boy, I was fascinated, for I had thought that Max would mend his ways. I felt very much ashamed of him, above all because that beast Kisling so delighted in his behaviour, Kisling who laughed at everything. Perhaps in order to escape the sarcasm, ironical remarks and doubts even of his friends, Max Jacob did not like talking about his baptism or any religious subject: or perhaps he felt ashamed or embarrassed.

It was in 1921 that Max Jacob began going to St Benoît-sur-Loire. He said that at Paris he sinned all the time because people bothered and irritated him, and that he sought solitude in order to find himself again and come closer to God. But this did not prevent his returning to Paris very often, and even going out a great deal among people. One evening he asked me why I was so sad and kept so much to myself. I told him frankly that my father had committed suicide a short time before, and that this made me unwell. My friends asked me out in order to divert my mind, since loneliness was bad for me. Jacob asked me to tell him the details about my father's death and about my own life. I told him all my dreams about my father ever since my childhood – prophetic dreams about his tragic death: dreams I had had years and years before. My uncle had accused me of causing my father's death and I suffered from a guilty conscience. I told him that a priest had advised me to become a Catholic, like my father and grandfather. Jacob was concerned and wanted to cast my horoscope; but I had heard that these were more like old wives' tales, and people laughed at his horoscopes. Perhaps he wanted to amuse his friends or anyone who could be useful to him. His nature was very unbalanced. Sometimes it was impossible to talk seriously to him: he would skilfully change the subject, or give nonsensical answers. Sometimes he was embarrassed or shy. He was the son of a Jewish antiquarian bookseller from Quimper in Brittany, and was brought up in the Jewish faith. His religious impulses were a mixture of the subtlety of a Cabbalist, of illuminism, of the Talmud, of astrology and the candour and naïvety of a Breton peasant. Through his poetry one can see and feel the life of the poet, no matter where he lives – Brittany, Montmartre or St Benoît-sur-Loire; his life is reflected in his poetry, and is rooted in his everyday environment, a mixture of life real and imaginary. At the end of his *Art poétique* he writes: "I dreamed of re-creating earthly

life in the atmosphere of heaven." These words explain all his poetry, explain the uniformity of his work and what is most characteristic in it. *Burlesque et mystique* is the title of one of his earliest books, ascribed to an imaginary Frère Motorel. Max Jacob loved the art of the street and of the soil; he liked the things of nature: he liked to be on intimate terms both with things and with people – and even with the gods. In 1917 he published himself *Carnet de dés*, of which the preface is as it were a manifesto. He was very successful with his *Poèmes en prose*, a written poetry different from oral poetry, in which he played upon a great fund of varying tones, and which he called melody. It is a very important work, and is directed against soulless "literary" poetry and is enthroned under the name of "surrealism", launched by Apollinaire. In his prose Max Jacob is a moralist and a creator of characters, and he depicts the misery of man without God.

Max Jacob came to Paris in the heroic epoch of the birth of cubism, and at once became an intimate of Picasso's, who introduced him to Apollinaire; it is certain that the two poets derived much inspiration and stimulation from each other, their inclinations being born under the sign of rebellion against literary poetry. Yet there is a difference between Jacob and Apollinaire as poets. The latter attaches great importance to the melody in his poetry and to the rhythm, which suited his voice very well: while Jacob knew nothing of the secret of verbal melody; but he is a great poet if poetry is before all else spontaneity, impulse, fantasy and playing upon words. And if the renown of Apollinaire, hero of the war and "master" of the poetry of the Left Bank, has for a long time eclipsed that of "poor Jacob", as he is often called, who preferred the solitude of St Benoît to the life of a man of letters, and then had a wretched end, justice will be done, and his proper place will be given to the less fortunate poet.

Max Jacob and Erik Satie resembled each other in some traits of their characters. They were both humorists, mystics and scoffers. In his books of poems Max Jacob wrote some with titles "*en forme de . . .*". In their inter-relation of shape and content these all resemble the music of Satie, the composer of "Morceau en forme de poire". He, too, was a humanist and he as well went in a great deal for parody. Max Jacob also was a musician: did he owe some of his ideas to Satie?

What, then, was Max Jacob? He was a poet, an innovator, a storyteller, a humorist and a mystic. If I am asked: "What was he as a man?" I reply: "There were two men in Max Jacob, a writer and

painter of men's natures, and a believer; and these two men, quite different from each other, both dwelt in him and had no knowledge of each other. One was the satirical writer, the savage humorist, the cruel and pessimistic journalist; on the other side was the man of religion, permeated by mysticism, innocent. As in all men, there were good and evil, and a perpetual struggle between them. There was a striving towards purity: Max Jacob wished to be a saint, and I believe that at the end of his life he succeeded. He wished to travel towards God, but he chose a route that was too hard. He was called, 'poor Jacob': his life was rent by long years of poverty, by toil, by passion; a life permeated with poetry, which at the end was transformed into a Christian vocation."

He spent the years to travelling in Italy, Spain and Brittany, and, after a period of much foppery and dissipation, he was overcome by disquiet at this way of life and went to live at St Benoît-sur-Loire for good. I should like to think that he found tranquillity in his last days.

On 27 February, Max Jacob was taken by the Germans to the camp at Drancy, where his sister was already; and he fell ill and died. He is buried at Ivry.

25

AT THE TIME WHEN I KNEW FONTENOY AND HIS WIFE THERE often came to the Dôme with them a small, bearded man with dainty movements and tiny hands and feet. Fontenoy introduced us one day:

"My friend Gilbert Mair, a writer."

They talked of their work – Mair was doing some literary job for Fontenoy. Looking at them I could not help noticing how different they were. As Fontenoy was excited, gesticulated, sometimes even became pathetic, so the other preserved his calm and watched Fontenoy with a look that was amused and smiling, or ironical and bored. He rumbled his beard with his little fingers, and from time to time our eyes met, and I am sure we understood each other. At our first meet-

ings I did not join in their conversation: it was only little by little, and as we became better acquainted, that I risked putting in a word.

I was enormously appreciative of the little man's delicacy. I knew quite well that he was not rich: far from that, he had great financial anxieties. At the time when I met him I told him that I had an adorable little daughter who was very dear to me but whom I was having the greatest difficulty in bringing up, since I did not know how to pay for her education, apart from her artistic education. Marika was still having lessons in classical dancing, but from a different professor now, Olga Preobrazhenskaya, the former star of the Imperial Corps de Ballet of Petrograd.

In response to my moans Gilbert Mair said that he would make an effort: he was very busy, but he would try to give Marika lessons in French grammar, and would also ask his sister, who taught at the Sorbonne, to give her work to do.

"If she's intelligent," he said, "she'll get on faster like this than most children at school."

He also wanted very much to meet the little girl of eight of whom I talked so much and whom I was soon expecting (she was still at Mios). He came to see me several times, and called one day with one of his friends, Krakowsky, a Polish writer and diplomatist who, to please Mair, bought a pastel of mine. I told them of the fatal accident that had happened during the winter – the woman burnt to death – and asked them whether they happened to know of any lodging free; but they did not.

When Marika was back, she was scared at first at the sight of the little bearded gentleman; but in no time she was friends with him; his beard reminded her slightly of Dr Germain, with whom she had spent the winter at Mios. So Gilbert Mair came regularly twice a week to our little room, and, while I was out shopping or about my business, he worked with the little girl. When I came in I would find the pair of them sitting at the table, Marika with wrinkled brow, making a great effort, and Mair trying to collect all his patience and composure. It was hard for them both; but it was enough that I was in the room for work to slow down, and they began chattering almost at once. Marika told amusing tales of her life at Mios and Taussat; I talked about my earlier years, about the Caucasus; and Mair, falling into the trap, spoke about his own childhood and his pranks at college. We laughed; I made tea, and sometimes evening came and caught us still chattering, all three

sitting on the bed. Marika was gay and terribly talkative. We ended by having dinner together – oh, a very frugal one: I would make vermicelli soup flavoured with *bouillon Kub*; one of us, sometimes myself, sometimes Mair (to save me from going out if it was a rainy evening) went for ham, sardines, eggs, or sauerkraut and cheese, and the meal went off very cheerfully. We had good appetites on those evenings. When Mair said goodbye, Marika used to kiss him on the beard.

"You know, *maman*," she would say, "I should love to have a papa like that. I say, *maman*, wouldn't you like it?"

I used to answer that we were only good friends, and that Mair and I had not even any idea of playing at papa and mamma.

"It's a great pity!" Marika sighed.

During all this time when Marika was living with me I had much help also from Zamaron and Félix Fénéon – help both moral and financial.

I went on working in our little room; but I heard that Ilya Ehrenburg was living in a hotel in the avenue du Maine, and, Ilya himself having told me that the manager was a Russian and the rooms were not at all bad, I went there, and I took a big room with two windows, with a very big bed which would do for Marika and me.

I did our small amount of cooking on a spirit-lamp; but we bought our vegetables ready-cooked, so that our kitchen work was reduced to cooking the meat and boiling the milk. Life was pretty good – except that, to make things harder, money was sometimes short. Fortunately, Gilbert Mair had the good idea, and the kindness, to apply for me for a grant from the Beaux-Arts relief fund. They granted fifteen hundred francs – a fortune!

26

MARIKA AND I LIVED PEACEFULLY IN OUR HOTEL IN THE avenue du Maine. She still went to her dancing school, and Gilbert Mair's sister gave her lessons. I painted, sold pictures, struggled with life, with the world.

Sometimes Marika went to the Fishers' to play with their daughter, Tora, who was now five or six. I used to fetch her in the evening, and the Fishers usually kept me to dinner.

"Why don't you rent an apartment, Marevna?" Elen asked me more than once. "It would be so much more comfortable, and better for you than eternally living at a hotel."

It was true, of course: but I should have had to buy furniture and linen; and I had not nearly enough money to go in for luxuries like that.

It was about this time that Gustave Kahn told me that I absolutely must give an exhibition at his gallery in the avenue Kléber, a big room at the *Quotidien* office, a newspaper with which he had a great deal to do. So I set myself to work seriously. Poor Marika had to sit for me many times, and the sittings would sometimes have a dramatic close: she was quickly tired of holding a pose, whether sitting or standing, and I would fly into a rage and throw books at her – fortunately without ever hurting her. I would also throw my palette, my brushes, even the canvas I was working on, and that frightened her even more; but in spite of everything we ended by working well together. Dear child! I could find a heap of excuses for myself: there was my youth, my passionate temperament too much repressed by that life of incessant work and worry – and by the place occupied in my life by the little girl, who finally swallowed the whole of it. I was living too temperately, in conflict with my nature; and I was working too hard. My nerves, then, nagged at me terribly. In my innocence I did not know what was the matter with me. One must not discount either my impatience to achieve something more solid, to obtain greater security for my child. Everywhere I saw displays of the selfishness of men; everywhere I ran up against the harshness of life. I began to tremble with fear for Marika when I thought of the future. If my own career was hard, what would things be like for a young girl as beautiful as Marika promised to be? More than ever I regretted the absence of her father who, by what I heard, was carving out a greater and greater reputation in Mexico and North America. How much simpler everything would be if the little girl could go and join him there: but how? We often talked of him, but the reverence that she had at first evinced towards him was beginning to turn into genuine hatred. At the bottom of her heart she loved him. But she also bore him ill will for deserting us, for so much neglect and indifference, and her child's soul was wounded. She could not yet understand.

Gustave Kahn, then, had generously put at my disposal his gallery at the *Quotidien*. At last I was ready to exhibit. (I borrowed from friends the frames I needed.) I have already mentioned this exhibition and said that the varnishing day was a real day of glory for me. Gustave Kahn and his wife had invited a crowd of people, writers, artists or simply people who were rich and influential. There was even a Minister, and the next day he let me know that the State would buy one of my oils, a pointillist still-life.

Need I say that, when I saw my pictures hung and people passing to and fro in front of them, I felt terribly nervous? It was the first big exhibition of my own that I had had. Kahn was very pleased, and never stopped repeating that all I had to do now was to work with all my might, to start exhibiting again the next year.

As a matter of fact I exhibited again immediately after this show, being one of a group this time; and the State again bought a picture, a big drawing of a little girl, while Mme Kahn herself bought another picture of mine.

Marika was happy, and so was I. The only tiresome thing was that the State's money took time to travel from the Treasury into my pocket. One must wait and wait. One might die of hunger or sickness: one must wait, always wait. Papers, red tape, all the gentlemen, who, supposedly, were benevolent and beneficent – but *only* within the rules and regulations. I begged Gustave Kahn, Gilbert Mair and Fontenoy to do something. to implore the Ministry of Fine Arts to be as quick as possible in paying me the money.

I particularly remember one day when I went to Fontenoy's to ask him to telephone someone at the Ministry and find out whether my business was coming off or not. (I had urgent debts at the hotel and almost everywhere, and I knew that Fontenoy had important connections.) He was in a good mood that day and seized the telephone and asked for some highly placed person. When he had him on the line he put my case to him: I had no money; I had a child; I would be very happy if I received the money from the State as quickly as possible; it was a question of life and death for me, etc. The answer was that everything possible would be done, but that I must "have patience": it usually took several months.

"*Merde*, then!" said Fontenoy.

"Pardon?" the voice enquired.

"I said '*merde*'!" Fontenoy retorted. "Because that's as good as to

say you can jolly well kick the bucket while you're waiting. A gesture is made to help an artist, single or with a family to support; but what's the use of such a gesture if the help doesn't arrive at once? I tell you again: Madame Marevna has a sick child that needs a visit to the country."

"Do believe that I understand and that I am greatly distressed; but I can do no more, *cher monsieur*. She must wait."

"Thank you for your kind answer. . . . But by the way, *cher monsieur*, I expect you're bald, aren't you? I know an excellent way of making hair grow again."

"What? Pardon? What do you say?" stammered the voice.

"I'm saying that to make hair grow again, *cher monsieur*, the great thing to do is to rub your skull with an onion every night before you get into bed, and then wait . . . wait. *Au revoir*, and thank you once more."

And Fontenoy hung up, laughing like a maniac.

I was greatly annoyed, for I was convinced he had wrecked the whole business simply in order to have some fun.

"Not at all: you'll see," he said. "Everything will go swimmingly. Those chaps need a good jawing now and then."

On the next day I went to the gallery, where I found Gustave Kahn looking annoyed and his wife tight-lipped and with a face of fury.

"Well, your friend Fontenoy did a fine job yesterday. What got into him, to use expressions like that to a gentleman who meant nothing but kindness to you, Marevna? I'm very much afraid, now, that everything's in the soup. Anyhow what does the fellow mean to you? Is he a relation? a fiancé? Or friend? Why does he meddle in your affairs – especially in a way that can only do you harm, my poor Marevna? Look here: we strain every nerve for you, we do our very best to rescue you from poverty, to launch you and get you known; and all the time you're entertaining yourself by associating with a madman like that, a creature who's completely cracked. . . . You must choose between that sort of person and us."

As he reached his moving climax in came Fontenoy and walked over to me with a smile on his lips as though everything was first-class.

"Well?" he said. "Things going all right?"

I explained to him that the man he had telephoned had called up Gustave Kahn to complain of the facetiousness that he had had to listen to as if coming from me; and that after that I stood a good chance of not getting a halfpenny.

"I swear," Fontenoy exclaimed, "anyone would think you were blaming me now. It's incredible. I do all I can for you: I give that chap a good jawing and then, straight off, you come and lick the boots of these old Jews!"

At this moment there came into the gallery Bottema, a Dutch painter, a friend of Fontenoy's and mine, but he no sooner heard the other bellowing than he nimbly took himself off; and at that Fontenoy rammed on his hat in a rage and in his turn went away.

So there I was, left in the middle of the gallery, not knowing which saint to turn to to put things right.

Gustave Kahn was a delightful man, as scrupulous as could be, and I was very fond of him. He might be sixty-eight or seventy, and was small, white-haired and rather bent. He talked in a low, gentle voice. He adored impressionist painting (which was how I explained his liking for me), and he knew that Fénéon, Signac and Zamaron liked my work; and this old gentleman, who had been friends with all the impressionists who were dead, concerned himself with me and encouraged me. He had taken charge of the publicity for my exhibition, and had published in the *Quotodien* a reproduction of my still-life and announced that the State had bought that same year an oil-painting by Pissaro's grandson and another by Marevna, a Russian artist. He had also had a signed review in the *Mercur de France*. Again, he had come one day with several dozen people (people concerned with art or sport . . . or life: I forget), and given them a discourse on impressionism as it had been. He concluded that Signac was the only impressionist still alive, but that my technique was more subtle and more likeable, because of the transparence and the delicacy of my colours.

"And look! Here is the very young lady, the painter of these lovely things. We may congratulate her: she will go far."

I had been hiding behind a window-curtain, and Kahn's daughter had to come and dislodge me by force; so that I was obliged to undergo the martyrdom of being examined like a curious animal.

"You must expect it: it's necessary, little one," the delightful man told me later. "You mustn't hide: on the contrary, I want you to be seen. People must know who you are and what sort of person."

And now a madman – a kind madman, but a madman none the less – was jeopardizing everything. . . . I stayed there pondering in silence. I could not decently run Fontenoy down: he was a good comrade, and

often, when he knew that I was in difficulties – was waiting for money or work – he would ask us to lunch or dinner. Perhaps his young wife was not always pleased, as for her it meant extra work, and she wanted to paint; but Fontenoy, with all the good humour and heedlessness of egoism, compelled us to stay and talk till other friends came to join us. (I learned later how sick his wife had become of this sort of thing, which prevented her from working. They were both extravagant, fantastic people, but with hearts of gold.)

At last I did receive the money from the State, and the disastrous incident was half-forgotten: I say “half” because Mme Kahn still bore me a grudge.

I believe that Gilbert Mair brought an element of decency, of depth which, since the days of Gorki, Rivera, Ehrenburg and Max Voloshin, I had always lacked. He was a real friend. To start with I found him terribly impressive: I set him on a pedestal and believed, I desired to believe, that he was an exceptional man. A pupil of Bergson’s must not be a man like the rest! Later on I watched, and I discerned delightful weaknesses in him, the weaknesses of an intelligent child, rather delicate and precocious. Marika and I were extremely fond of him. I think I am not mistaken when I say that this friend of ours could do us nothing but good – especially to my daughter when she was just opening out.

27

ONE MORNING (PROVIDENCE IS CERTAINLY AN EARLY RISER), while we were counting the little money we had, I had come to the conclusion that at all costs I must find a regular job. Yet I reflected that I was told everywhere: “It’s the crisis. There’s nothing to do but wait for better times. Nobody’s buying pictures these days. . . .” (This was not true. My comrades were selling; painters of some standing were selling a lot, at high prices, abroad, while I dilled away with my tongue hanging out.) One morning, then, as I was pondering the injustice of fate, I heard a knock at the door. Marika, with an air of mystery, said:

"You'll see: I'm sure it's St Antony of Padua. I prayed hard to him yesterday to help us. It seems he's a radical and always helps the unfortunate. . . ."

She went to open, and the doorway framed the tall, thin outline of Bottema (he was very like Don Quixote).

He came in, and his first words were:

"I've brought you some money, my dear Madame Marevna. You will remember that you left two pictures with me some months ago? Well, I came back from Holland yesterday, and today I've brought you the money for the two pictures, which I've sold. And that isn't all: a certain gentleman has seen your pictures, and he and his wife want you to come to Holland and paint some family portraits for them. They've invited you both, yourself and Marika. If you accept I am authorized to take your tickets: I have the necessary money. Personally I advise you to accept: there's no reason why you shouldn't pick up other commissions. And besides, it will be a chance to see the country and the museums there, which are very fine."

Marika was already clapping her hands.

"I say, *maman*, we're going? Quick, we're going, aren't we?"

I answered Bottema that I accepted the invitation. In Paris the prospect was blocked in every direction. He gave us two or three days to get ready, to get our passports and visas.

When Belgium could be seen through the carriage windows, then Holland, flat and green and sprinkled with windmills; when Marika saw the little houses with their window-frames painted white and their pots of geraniums, she told me that "she liked Holland very much." She did not miss our dusty, greyish Paris.

It was evening when we arrived at Almelo station after a hot journey (for this was at the beginning of June). I looked for somebody who might be meeting us at the station, a man, for preference. I could only see a young girl who was looking all round her on the platform. Eventually, when only she and we were left, she came up and asked me whether I was not Madame Marevna, I said I was, and introduced Marika. She said she was the eldest daughter of the family:

"I expected to find a lady of a certain age," she said. "I'm very surprised to see that it's not so at all." (Her name was Bella Bendien.) "My parents will be very astonished too. I'm very pleased that you're not old!" And she laughed.

A luxurious car was waiting for us outside, and Bella took the wheel

to drive us to Almelo. When we came to the house the parents had already gone to bed. In the dining room three boys were sitting at a huge round table, reading newspapers. They stood up and bowed politely, while they took stock of us and exchanged some remarks in Dutch. Bella offered us some refreshment, but Marika had been sick in the train, what with tiredness and the heat, and I asked only for a cup of tea; then we went upstairs to bed in a big room with two nice beds in it. As I fell asleep I recalled what my daughter had said about St Antony of Padua: what had happened to us was clearly something like a miracle.

In the morning, when we looked out of the window, we discovered a landscape whose colours were profoundly different from the everyday appearance of France. In the garden a fresh breeze was making everything shake. All the leaves were trembling; all the trees looked silvery and somewhat reminded me by their colours of young birches or the olive trees on the Côte d'Azur.

We went down to the dining room and found on the table a great tureen of porridge, milk, coffee, white bread, black bread, buttered toast and cheese on toast. I helped Marika to what she wanted. . . . I must say that we were rather amazed at such a display of good things; but we showed ourselves moderate in our appetites . . . and very well brought up. I heard afterwards that our restraint was admired, and I told Marika that I had been right to teach her good manners.

While we were having breakfast M. and Mme Bendien came in and we introduced ourselves.

"You're a real little Parisian, Mme Marevna," said M. Bendien. "My wife and I are delighted to have you here, you and your charming little girl. I hope we shall become great friends, and that you'll both be happy here."

He was rather short, over sixty, with hair and eyes black as jet, a very pale face, an aquiline nose and a hard, wilful mouth with rather thick lips. He was very scrupulous about his person. He had small, dry hands, and small feet in smart shoes. His wife, on the other hand, was much taller than he, with a high colour, blue eyes and a big, laughing mouth. Indeed, she liked laughing, and very loudly, and one could not help imitating her, her laugh was so infectious.

The Bendiens had four sons, of whom one died while still quite young – the eldest, I believe; and it was a long time before Titte, his mother, recovered from her grief. They had also two daughters:

Bella, who was the second of all their children, and Elenke, the youngest, who was seven, fearfully spoilt by the whole family, and a regular tomboy.

After a few days of jealousy, sulks and shyness Elenke got used to Marika; and they soon started jabbering in a mixture of French and Dutch.

We were really spoilt in every way. I shall never forget Marika's amazement, and mine too, on the day when nine chickens were brought to the table *en* a dish – one for each person. I took one and started to halve it, for the two of us. Jacob stopped me, and said it was not worth while giving oneself the trouble of dividing a chicken in two; and he insisted on Marika's eating a whole one. She was greatly delighted and set to work tooth and claw, like a little cat.

I began by painting Bella's portrait: I painted her looking pink and fresh, with all her hair down. I felt her to be extremely Flemish and I wanted to show her like that. When the picture was finished there was a champagne banquet, and I sprinkled a few drops on the canvas by way of baptism. Her brothers made fun of Bella and swore she had misled me finely, and that I had not known much about her when I had made her a virgin; but I had been left entirely at liberty in my work, and I did things all in my own way. The second portrait was Mme Bendien's with her younger daughter. This was a *less* easy affair: the little girl, two years younger than Marika, was terribly wayward and obstinate. I said with a laugh that I was painting a portrait of Titte and *Têtue* (Pighead).

Next I did a still-life, of my room with a view of the garden; and after that big drawings of Jacob and all his sons. When I had finished the family I was asked to go to the family of Jacob's brother, who lived next door; so I did a portrait of Mme Agnès Bendien, with her ruddy-gold hair like an aureole framing her long, delicately coloured face. She had sky-blue eyes and golden eye-lashes and eye-brows. The whole was strange and pleasant, and seemed to belong to the Middle Ages; moreover Mme Agnès's family, as I learnt later, were Protestants whose line went straight back to mediaeval times. Her only son was also fair, but lighter, with great blue eyes fringed with lashes which were fair too. I think I did very successful portraits of these two people who were full of character and very striking and exceptional.

I believe that if my stay had been at all prolonged my enthusiasm for my task could only have gone on increasing. I took a keen pleasure

in observing the dress of the peasants, the mariners and the folk of the canals. Each of these types of people had its own style and colour of clothes. I remember that I also managed to paint the portrait of a farmer's wife in her Sunday clothes. (I believe that picture is in Zamaron's private collection.)

Every Sunday at Almelo the whole family, ourselves included, used to go for long drives by car. When we arrived at such-and-such a place we would get out of the motor and walk for ten or fifteen kilometres through fields and forests. I remember driving like this to the edge of the Black Forest in Germany; and I must say it was splendid. I felt strongly attracted by these woods, which perhaps reminded me of the great expanses of forest of my childhood in Russia and in the Caucasus.

Marika developed and blossomed out physically and morally: this change was a perpetual joy to me. The sensible life in the bosom of that big family was wholesome for her. The friendship and respect with which we were surrounded not only filled her with a sense of well-being: she drew assurance from them. I felt a similar effect myself, and I looked on the future with greater courage and self-confidence.

We finally left Almelo to go to stay with the Bendiens' Aunt Fanny near The Hague, to a little house close to the sea. I can still see myself putting the finishing touches to the portrait of a daughter of a picture-dealer (I was quite enamoured of that picture: the girl represented such a curious mixture of races, and looked strangely like a Hindu); meanwhile Fanny taught Marika to cook and to make lovely jam tarts. When I came back in the evening I used to go and collect the two from the beach. I would catch sight of them far off, walking in the wind, red-cheeked, with their clothes plastered to their bodies as they struggled against the squalls. Great waves rolled towards them and sometimes deluged them with foam and spray, and Marika would come darting to meet me uttering shrill cries like a seagull.

Fine days . . . and fine days go by too quickly. The clouds now were bigger and hung lower; the mornings were misted by a fine rain. It was time to think of going back to Paris.

It was suggested that I should stay in Holland, where I could settle down to a pleasant, easy life; but I had to think of Marika's artistic future, and I saw nothing round me which could compare with the instruction she was getting from Olga Preobrazhenskaya; even in Paris there was no better teacher of dancing for beginners. I counted a great

deal, too, on Gilbert Mair to watch over and assist Marika's moral development. This seemed to me a better solution than a college or *lycée*. Perhaps this was a cruel mistake: I wished to give my child the opportunity of developing in freedom. How many times I had myself regretted the years wasted at the *gimnaziya* at Tiflis, to the detriment of my painting, sculpture, music. It seemed to me that Marika would learn more in an atmosphere of liberty: I forgot the discipline which every child must undergo. I had unbounded confidence in my daughter, and in my friends: I hoped that they would have a better influence on her than the company of other children who were strangers to our circle. Was I wrong?

28

OUR RETURN TO PARIS WAS ALMOST A TRIUMPH COMPARED with what our departure had been. I had put money aside, and we had filled out and were luxuriously dressed. Before Marika lay the prospect of her lessons, and her dancing, of which she was passionately fond; before me the preparations for an exhibition for Holland, together with the hope of being able to make up the time I had lost in my weaving jobs.

Zamaron, who had always been our friend, promised me to arrange a second exhibition, in Paris, after the Holland one, and guaranteed me his help, and success in every respect. A strenuous and active life seemed to await us, and I believed I could foresee for my daughter a future of greater happiness and ease. “

There now began a new epoch in our lives, no less agitating, no less rich in adventure and experience, no less populated by new acquaintances who were to influence, some more, some less, our two destinies.

Intelligent, sensitive to music, with a talent for dancing and drawing, Marika promised to become a valued friend, and also to help me with my work.

If one day I should continue this account of my life, I shall have to say more about my daughter, of her development and progress in her

own province, her physical flowering, and her metamorphosis into a ravishing, restless adolescent, then into a disturbing young woman.

I remember a day (I shall end on this anecdote, a vivid symbol of the passage of time) when Gilbert Mair visited me, saw a nude of Marika and asked me in great surprise by what miracle I had been able to imagine her like that.

"But it's exactly what she is like today," I replied.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed. "She's a woman already."

Marika was just fourteen, and I was forty-three – the prime of life!

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